

## PERSPECTIVES ON CONSCIOUSNESS

**Professor James S. Cutsinger**

The aim of this seminar is to inquire into the nature of consciousness.

What does it mean to be conscious? Can consciousness be explained satisfactorily on the basis of non-conscious factors and processes? Does human consciousness differ in kind from the consciousness of animals? If so, is it possible deliberately to exploit that difference in such a way as to extend the range of consciousness?

While the opinions of those who represent mainstream academia will be given careful attention, a special emphasis will be placed on the insights of authors whom Professor Cutsinger calls “epistemological radicals”, authors whose aim is to challenge contemporary assumptions regarding the origin, nature, and scope of a fully conscious human being.

Central to the course is a Socratic dialogue, *Worlds Apart*, by the historian of consciousness Owen Barfield, whom C. S. Lewis called “the wisest and best of my unofficial teachers”. Students will also read *The Mind’s Eye (I)*, a collection of short articles and chapters drawn from a wide range of contemporary sources, compiled by Professor Cutsinger.

### **Method**

The seminar will be conducted as a Socratic discussion. Each class begins with a question about the reading for the day, and students are expected to join with the instructor and each other in a shared conversational inquiry. A premium is placed on precision, explanation, and defense. Students will be held doubly accountable: for courteously listening to the contributions of others and for patiently justifying their own observations.

While it is sometimes thought that Socratic conversation is less rigorous than a more didactic and professorial pedagogy, its rigor is simply of another kind. In the serious cross-examination of an author’s work, the course of conversation is often unpredictable; it is certainly less linear than in the “traditional” classroom. But the intellectual commitment required, the daily vigilance, demands a preparation and yields a mental fitness not promoted by other forms of learning. These advantages will be pressed to the full in this course.

### **Requirements**

1. *Reading*. In keeping with Socrates’ observation that “it is better to deal thoroughly with a little than unsatisfactorily with a lot” (*Theaetetus*, 187e), reading assignments are relatively short. Students are expected to study the assigned texts very closely and carefully, however; underlining important words and passages and maintaining a dialogue with the authors through copious marginal comments are essential preparations for class discussion.

2. *Attendance*, both prompt and regular. In keeping with the University's "ten percent rule", there will be a penalty of one letter grade per absence for unexcused absences in excess of two. And attendance means punctuality; tardy arrivals and seminars are a disastrous mix.

3. *Constructive participation*. For obvious reasons, this course is not for students who prefer an education they can simply ingest as the passive takers of notes; it is for those who enjoy the acts of thinking and reflection and argument. Frequent contributions to class discussion are not merely desirable; they are essential. One third of the final course grade will be based on class participation.

4. *Essays*. Students will write three essays of 5-6 pages each. Neither book-reports nor research-papers, these essays should be viewed instead as continuing conversations with the authors. Professor Cutsinger's *Breviary of English Usage*, which can be found on his website under "Teaching", will be used in his commentary on these essays. Grades received on the two best essays will be used in calculating the final course grade (one-third each).

## Schedule

	Aug. 18, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 1
Aug. 23, <i>Worlds Apart</i> , pp. 1-36	Aug. 25, <i>Worlds Apart</i> , pp. 36-74
Aug. 30, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 2	Sep. 1, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 3
Sep. 6, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 4	Sep. 8, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 5
Sep. 13, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 6	Sep. 15, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 7
Sep. 20, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 8	Sep. 22, Open Discussion
Sep. 27, <i>Worlds Apart</i> , pp. 75-108	Sep. 29, <i>Worlds Apart</i> , pp. 108-142
Oct. 4, <i>Worlds Apart</i> , pp. 142-76	Oct. 6, <i>Worlds Apart</i> , pp. 176-208
Oct. 11, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 9	Oct. 13, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 10, pp. 189-207
Oct. 18, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 10, pp. 207-235	Oct. 20, Fall Break
Oct. 25, Lecture in Colorado (No Class)	Oct. 27, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 11, pp. 236-52
Nov. 1, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 11, pp. 252-70	Nov. 3, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 12, pp. 271-97
Nov. 8, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 12, pp. 298-327	Nov. 10, <i>Mind's Eye (I)</i> , Ch. 12, pp. 327-48
Nov. 15, <i>Worlds Apart</i> , pp. 209-242	Nov. 17, <i>Worlds Apart</i> , pp. 242-76

Nov. 22, AAR (No Class)

Nov. 24, Thanksgiving (No Class)

Nov. 29, Open Discussion

Dec. 1, Conclusion

## **Readings**

- 1 Steven Pinker, "The Mystery of Consciousness"
- 2 A. M. Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"
- 3 Daniel C. Dennett, "Making a Conscious Robot"
- 4 John R. Searle, "Consciousness"
- 5 Patricia S. Churchland, "Neurobiology of the Mind"
- 6 Daniel C. Dennett, "The Zombic Hunch"
- 7 David J. Chalmers, "The Matrix as Metaphysics"
- 8 C. S. Lewis, "The Cardinal Difficulty of Naturalism"
- 9 Edward and Emily Kelly, "Empirical Challenges"
- 10 E. Kelly and Michael Grosso, "Mystical Experience"
- 11 Ken Wilber, "An Integral Theory of Consciousness"
- 12 P. D. Ouspensky, "The Fourth Way"

## **Grading Scheme**

### **I. Contributions to Class-Discussion (One-third of final course grade)**

One-third of the student's final grade will be based on contributions to class-discussion. Constructive participation is not something easily quantified, but the following scale provides some basic guidelines:

- A = Excellent. One of the top contributors in the class.
- B = Above Average. Generally a strong contributor.
- C = Average. Someone who is occasionally "on", but not dependable.
- D = Below Average. A student who hardly ever contributes.
- F = Unacceptable. A student who never contributes.

It should be understood that the highest grades do not necessarily go to those who are the most long-winded or who merely speak with the greatest frequency. What Professor Cutsinger looks for—and endeavors to model—are contributions, however lengthy or numerous, which reflect a careful, thoughtful reading of the assigned materials and which help the whole class better understand the meaning and implications of those readings.

## II. Essays (Two-thirds of final course grade)

Each student will be asked to write three essays; the two best essays are used in determining a final grade at the end of the term. Professor Cutsinger has very high standards when it comes to writing. Here is how he converts these standards into grades:

**A.** This is an essay that demonstrates a real mastery of both readings and discussions; the author's claims are well-grounded in quotations from the readings, and connections are made where appropriate to points considered in class-discussion; the paper is imaginative and provocative in its approach and thorough in its presentation; it is focused throughout on a single idea, clearly introduced and faithfully pursued, and it contains very few, if any, grammatical, logical, or mechanical errors. It is a pleasure to read.

**B.** This is an essay that is more or less logically and grammatically sound, with fewer than ten stylistic errors or infelicities; it is enriched by quotations from the readings and by allusions to class-discussion, though these are not as well integrated into the argument as in an "A" paper; the author says nothing that is really wrong, but the approach is pedestrian and the interpretation is lacking in genuine insight. This is a solid piece of work, but it takes no risks and is rather boring.

**C.** This is an essay that has possibilities, but it fails to bring those possibilities to fruition; the reader has a vague sense of where it is heading, or at least wants to head, but it is "out of control": the syntax breaks down with disappointing regularity, there are conceptual inconsistencies ("x" is said on p. 1, but then the very opposite, "not-x", is affirmed on p. 3), and the mechanics tend to be sloppy, with frequent formatting, typographical, and spelling errors. The "underbrush" of mistakes is so thick that reading is laborious.

**D.** This is an essay that shows every sign of having been thrown together at the last minute; foolish mistakes make it clear that the author has not read the books carefully; the writing is "all over the map", and one searches in vain to find a single line of thought or thread of argument; the presentation is disfigured throughout by mechanical errors, to say nothing of syntactical and interpretive problems. The paper, in short, is slipshod, unintelligent, and unimaginative, and it is truly painful to read.

**F.** This grade is ordinarily reserved for an essay that fails to appear by the deadline announced in the syllabus, though on very rare occasions it is affixed to a piece of writing that is so abysmally bad as to have been better had it never been composed.