PHIX3063

Consciousness and Self

Session 1, Online-flexible 2022

Department of Philosophy

Contents

General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff
Convenor
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Credit points
10

Prerequisites
130cp at 1000 level or above

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description
This unit explores some of the major traditions in Philosophical and Scientific thinking about Consciousness and the Self. The unit introduces core questions concerning what consciousness is: What can we know about consciousness through scientific enquiry? How can a physical system, such as the brain, be conscious? How do we situate consciousness in a social and cultural context? The unit also introduces philosophical and scientific thinking about the self and introduces questions including: Is there really such a thing as a Self? Is the self narratively constructed? What is the relationship between the self and others?

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

> **ULO1:** Synthesize and analyze information from a variety of sources concerning foundational concepts and arguments in cognitive science, phenomenology and philosophy.

> **ULO2:** Articulate clearly and coherently philosophical arguments in written and oral form to a variety of audiences.

ULO3: Analyze and critically evaluate philosophical arguments.

ULO4: Apply acquired knowledge and skills in the context of philosophical and cognitive science scholarship.

ULO5: Explain and critically evaluate evidence from a broad range of disciplines including cognitive science, psychology, phenomenology, analytic and continental philosophy and neuroscience.

General Assessment Information

Late Assessment Submission Penalty

Unless a Special Consideration request has been submitted and approved, (a) a penalty for lateness will apply – 10 marks out of 100 credit will be deducted per day for assignments submitted after the due date – and (b) no assignment will be accepted seven days (incl. weekends) after the original submission deadline.

Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Hurdle	Due
Participation	20%	No	Ongoing
Online Quizzes	20%	No	Weekly, Sunday
Short media presentations	20%	No	17/04/2022
Research Essay	40%	No	05/06/2022

Participation

Assessment Type [1]: Participatory task
Indicative Time on Task [2]: 15 hours
Due: **Ongoing**
Weighting: **20%**

Active participation in online discussion and activities. Students are expected to be well-prepared, and make a constructive contribution.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Synthesize and analyze information from a variety of sources concerning foundational concepts and arguments in cognitive science, phenomenology and philosophy.

- Articulate clearly and coherently philosophical arguments in written and oral form to a variety of audiences.

Online Quizzes

Assessment Type [1]: Quiz/Test
Indicative Time on Task [2]: 15 hours
Due: **Weekly, Sunday**
Weighting: **20%**

Online Quizzes

On successful completion you will be able to:

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- Explain and critically evaluate evidence from a broad range of disciplines including cognitive science, psychology, phenomenology, analytic and continental philosophy and neuroscience.

Short media presentations

Assessment Type [1]: Media presentation
Indicative Time on Task [2]: 15 hours
Due: **17/04/2022**
Weighting: **20%**

Short format recorded presentations involving audio and/or visual material reflecting on questions posed by the weekly content

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Synthesize and analyze information from a variety of sources concerning foundational concepts and arguments in cognitive science, phenomenology and philosophy.
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- Analyze and critically evaluate philosophical arguments.

- Apply acquired knowledge and skills in the context of philosophical and cognitive science scholarship.

- Explain and critically evaluate evidence from a broad range of disciplines including cognitive science, psychology, phenomenology, analytic and continental philosophy and neuroscience.

Research Essay

Assessment Type [1]: Essay
Indicative Time on Task [2]: 30 hours
Due: **05/06/2022**
Weighting: **40%**

An essay based on topics from the course

On successful completion you will be able to:
- Synthesize and analyze information from a variety of sources concerning foundational concepts and arguments in cognitive science, phenomenology and philosophy.

- Articulate clearly and coherently philosophical arguments in written and oral form to a variety of audiences.

- Analyze and critically evaluate philosophical arguments.

- Apply acquired knowledge and skills in the context of philosophical and cognitive science scholarship.

- Explain and critically evaluate evidence from a broad range of disciplines including cognitive science, psychology, phenomenology, analytic and continental philosophy and neuroscience.

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[1] If you need help with your assignment, please contact:

- the academic teaching staff in your unit for guidance in understanding or completing this type of assessment

- the Writing Centre for academic skills support.

[2] Indicative time-on-task is an estimate of the time required for completion of the assessment task and is subject to individual variation

Delivery and Resources

Required Reading: There will be a core texts to read for each week of the course. It is

mandatory that these be read as tutorial discussions and lectures are based on these. The weekly readings will be available via the Leganto service, which is accessible through the ilearn. Additional optional and further readings will be made available electronically on the ilearn in each week. These will be useful for the research essays.

Technology Used and Required: We use an iLearn website, and the Echo360 lecture recordings. Any other material you need will be available through the iLearn website. We recommend you have access to a reliable internet connection throughout the semester.

Assignment Submission: Essay assignments in this course will be submitted electronically, as word documents or PDFs. There is no need for a coversheet - the iLearn assignment submission (Turnitin) involves declaring your details and honesty in submitting your work. Please note, we do not accept submission by email attachment. The short media presentation will be submitted as audio or video files to an OU Blog submission Link. Resources and advice on how to record these will be provided in task instructions. All assessment deadlines are based on local time in Sydney.

Unit Schedule

Week and lecture topic	Description		
PART ONE	CONSCIOUSNESS		
1. Introduction	A general introduction to the topics of consciousness and the self. We will be covering a brief history of Western philosophical and scientific investigations of the topic. The rest of the unit will be outlined, and the assessment structure will be explained. ***No Tutorial this week***		
2. The Hard Problem	We begin our exploration of consciousness by examining some of the central problems: What is qualia? What is the relationship of consciousness and the physical body? Why does the physical configuration of our brains and mechanisms performing cognitive functions give rise to conscious experience? Can conscious experience be accounted for by a physicalist description of the universe? Or do we need a revision to cognitive science and our metaphysical conception of the world?		
3. The Science of Consciousness	Having examined some of the core problems of consciousness we turn this week to surveying the recent cognitive science and neuroscientific investigations and models of consciousness. We consider the core questions for how and whether a science of consciousness is possible. In particular, the search for neural correlates of consciousness, what these are, and what these tell us about the nature of consciousness. This will push forward the debates from week 2 on whether we can have a reductive physicalist account of consciousness articulated in terms of a mechanistic explanation.		
4. Predictive Processing	Cognitive science, psychology, and philosophy of mind have long been beset by questions of theoretical unity. A very recent approach to the structure of the mind is predictive processing. This is the claim that our mind-brains are predictive engines: rather than our minds passively waiting for incoming stimuli they actively try to predict what the incoming sense stimuli will be. Our brains then assess the predictive error between the incoming stimuli and the prediction. This is a very hot topic in both philosophy of mind and the cognitive sciences. Some philosophers have claimed that it is a *new grand unified theory of the mind* (GUT). This is especially important given that there are wide ranging debates about how all the various differing sciences of the mind come together, and whether they can be unified into a single framework. Predictive processing accounts have been applied to a range of philosophical and psychological topics. Recently, philosophers and scientists have proposed that predictive processing can also give an account of the nature of consciousness and tackle the various philosophical and scientific problems here.		

5. Sleep and Dreams	This week, we will look at the topics of mind-wandering and sleep as phenomena that raise serious questions about a clear-cut distinction between wakefulness and consciousness. They can also be seen as case studies demonstrating the productive ways in which philosophy, phenomenology, and cognitive neuroscience come together.		
6. Consciousness in Non-Humans	So far, we have focused primarily on consciousness in humans. This week, we broaden our focus to include non-humans, primarily non-human animals. Are non-human animals conscious? How could we tell? If they are conscious, does this give us reason to refrain from harming or killing them for reasons of pleasure, amusement, or convenience? What can thinking about consciousness from an evolutionary perspective tell us about the function of consciousness?		
7. The Hard Problem Again, With Feeling	In our last week on consciousness, we return to the hard problem. Drawing on what we've covered in earlier weeks, and adding some perspectives from affective neuroscience and neuropsychoanalysis, we tackle the hard problem again, but this time with an emphasis on feeling. Have scientists and philosophers taken a wrong step in focusing on cognition when trying to solve the hard problem? Should we focus more on affect, on feeling? We will also question an assumption of the hard problem: that the brain causes consciousness. Could this be a mistake, like saying that lightning causes thunder?		
Mid Semester Recess			
PART TWO	THE SELF		
8. Theories of The Self	You are conscious, but who is this "you"? The obvious answer is that you are yourself. But what is the self? Does the self exist? If so, in what sense? In this second half of the unit, we turn to the topic of the self. In this first lecture on the topic, we begin by discussing some historical perspectives on the self, including sceptical perspectives, which question the existence of the self. Then we explore the self from a more developmental perspective. We begin life, we might say, with a minimal sense of self. But we develop something more, something like a narrative about ourselves. Why do we do this? And how do we get from mere consciousness to a fully-fledged sense of self?		
9. Feminist and Embodied approaches to the self	Having examined the theoretical questions surrounding the formation of selves, this week we examine a range of ethical, epistemological, social, and political questions about selfhood. Feminist philosophers have critiqued classical accounts of the self in the Western canon as overly individualistic and disembodied. Instead, it is claimed that the self should be reconceptualised as dynamic and relational.		
10. Agency, Free Will, and the Self	We typically experience our own intentional actions as being caused by our own thoughts. But is this experience an illusion? Many philosophers believe that we live in a deterministic universe, and that we therefore lack free will. If the self is supposed to be an agent, and we have no true agency, then the self is an illusion. This week, we consider these issues, along with a possible solution. Does it save the self? This depends. Even if it is convincing, there are more sceptical approaches to come.		
11. Psychoanalysis and The Self	Copernicus showed that we are not at the centre of the universe. Darwin showed that we are another species of great ape. Freud showed that we are not masters of our own minds. Does psychoanalysis, the field that Freud created, throw the existence of the self into question?		
12. Buddhism and the (No)Self	The claim that the self is an illusion is central to Buddhism. The Buddhist tradition teaches that suffering comes from clinging to the illusion of the self. What do Buddhist mean when they say that there is no self? What would it mean to lose your sense of self? Is it psychologically possible? Is it psychologically dangerous?		
13. Essay Writing Week	The final week of the course is set aside for research in which students will research and write their essay for the final assignment. *No Tutorial or Lecture in this week.*		

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from Policy Central (https://policies.mq.edu.au). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to

Learning and Teaching:

- Academic Appeals Policy
- Academic Integrity Policy
- Academic Progression Policy
- Assessment Policy
- Fitness to Practice Procedure
- Assessment Procedure
- Complaints Resolution Procedure for Students and Members of the Public
- Special Consideration Policy

Students seeking more policy resources can visit Student Policies (https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/policies). It is your one-stop-shop for the key policies you need to know about throughout your undergraduate student journey.

To find other policies relating to Teaching and Learning, visit Policy Central (https://policies.mq.edu.au) and use the search tool.

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: https://students.mq.edu.au/admin/other-resources/student-conduct

Results

Results published on platform other than eStudent, (eg. iLearn, Coursera etc.) or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in eStudent. For more information visit ask.mq.edu.au or if you are a Global MBA student contact globalmba.support@mq.edu.au

Academic Integrity

At Macquarie, we believe academic integrity – honesty, respect, trust, responsibility, fairness and courage – is at the core of learning, teaching and research. We recognise that meeting the expectations required to complete your assessments can be challenging. So, we offer you a range of resources and services to help you reach your potential, including free online writing and maths support, academic skills development and wellbeing consultations.

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit http://students.mq.edu.au/support/

The Writing Centre

The Writing Centre provides resources to develop your English language proficiency, academic writing, and communication skills.

- Workshops
- Chat with a WriteWISE peer writing leader
- Access StudyWISE
- Upload an assignment to Studiosity
- Complete the Academic Integrity Module

The Library provides online and face to face support to help you find and use relevant information resources.

- Subject and Research Guides
- Ask a Librarian

Student Services and Support

Macquarie University offers a range of Student Support Services including:

- IT Support
- Accessibility and disability support with study
- Mental health support
- Safety support to respond to bullying, harassment, sexual harassment and sexual assault
- Social support including information about finances, tenancy and legal issues

Student Enquiries

Got a question? Ask us via AskMQ, or contact Service Connect.

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit http://www.mq.edu.au/about_us/offices_and_units/information_technology/help/.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the Acceptable Use of IT Resources Policy. The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.