

PHIL0214-2 - Philosophy of Mind

Consciousness and Value

Syllabus

Main instructor: Anna Giustina

Invited instructors: Uriah Kriegel and Charles Siewert

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Office Hours: by appointment.

Time: Tuesday 15:00 – 17:00

Place: A1 2/Philosophie 1

Course Description

This course is about consciousness and its relationship with value.

Consciousness. Consciousness is one of the most puzzling and fascinating phenomena in nature. Each conscious creature experiences the world from its own, unique and unshareable, point of view—its subjective perspective. Conscious creatures perceive, think, want, feel, suffer, are moved. These and other states of mind are *experiences* that are *phenomenally conscious*: having them implies a peculiar subjective feeling—there is “something it is like” for a conscious creature to have such experiences.

Value. In the world, there seem to be *good* things and *bad* things, things that are good *for someone* or bad for someone else, or things that are *experienced* as good or bad. Questions around goodness and badness are questions of *value*. Value plays a crucial role in guiding our actions: we aim to pursue, preserve, and promote what we take to be valuable (for us), and avoid, extinguish, and prevent what we take to be disvaluable (for us).

Here are some of the questions we are going to address:

- What is consciousness and what is so special about being a conscious creature?
- What is the relationship between consciousness and self-consciousness and how does it contribute to our knowledge of consciousness?
- What is the value of consciousness? Do conscious states have value only because of what they allow for (they enable us to navigate and act in the world) or do they also have (some kind of) value *for their own sake*, independently of what they allow for?
- Can we, conscious beings, get an insight into what is valuable in the world just in virtue of having (some) conscious experiences?

Course organization and modality

The course will feature the presence of two leading figures in the philosophy of consciousness, who have played a crucial role in shaping the debate about the value of consciousness: Uriah Kriegel and Charles Siewert, both professors at Rice University (Houston TX, USA).

The first part of the course will be around the work of Charles Siewert, who will guest-teach four classes to discuss with students his recent and ongoing work on consciousness, self-consciousness and reflection, affective experience, and the relationship consciousness and value.

The second part of the course will be around the work of Uriah Kriegel, who will guest-teach three or four classes to discuss with students his recent and ongoing work on the value of consciousness, and in particular its epistemic value, its prudential value, its moral value, and its aesthetic value.

There will be a total of eleven classes, organized as per “Schedule and reading” below. The modality is in-person.

The course will be taught partly in English and partly in French. Understanding of written and spoken English is required. However, *speaking* English is *not required*: you can ask your questions and express your thoughts in French (both visiting instructors understand French).

Course objectives and Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, you will (i) have acquired an understanding of the most important philosophical issues about the value of consciousness; (ii) have strengthened your ability to analyze a philosophical text, critically evaluate a philosophical argument, develop your own philosophical ideas, and actively engage in philosophical discussion; (iii) appreciate the significance of the philosophical debate around the value of consciousness, partly by interacting with, and directly learning from, two leading philosophers who have given crucial contributions to it; (iv) have developed a deeper appreciation of the place and importance of consciousness and self-consciousness in human life.

Prerequisite

Understanding of written and spoken English is required.

Reading list

A reading list is provided in the “Schedule and reading” section below. Required readings will be available on MyUliege. Each reading must be done in advance of the lectures for which they are assigned.

Evaluation

- Six reading responses of half a page (25% of the final grade).
- A 1500/2000-word essay to be submitted before November 15th (25% of the final grade);
- A 2000/3000-word essay to be submitted before January 15th (50% of the final grade);
- Participation in class will be tie-breaker.

As for essays, a list of topics will be provided. I have very specific standards as to how an essay should be written. They are specified in the attached document: “How to write a good essay in philosophy.”

The reading responses will be on required readings. A reading response consists in explaining and/or commenting on some aspect of the required reading for the week it is submitted. Out of the nine required readings, you will have to submit at least six reading responses. Each reading response counts 20/6 points; so, if you submit all six reading responses, you will get a 20 for that part of the grade.

Attendance is required. Students should actively participate in class discussions, which implies (i) attending each class and (ii) reading each paper/chapter before the class it is assigned for.

Academic Integrity

If, in your written work, you present someone else’s words or ideas as your own, or if you do not credit the source of those words and ideas, you are committing plagiarism, which is a serious breach of academic integrity. So, if you use someone else’s words or ideas, always credit their author, either by adding reference to the source (if you rephrase the idea with your own words), or by inserting the text between inverted commas (if you are quoting someone else’s words). Plagiarizing essays will be failed.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

Schedule and reading

Introduction

1. Consciousness, subjectivity, value. 20/09/2022 (A. Giustina)

Part I. Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, and Value (with Charles Siewert)

2. Consciousness: search for a basic conception. 04/10/2022 (C. Siewert)

Required reading: Charles Siewert, “Chapter 4: In Search of a Basic Conception” (book chapter draft)

3. Self-consciousness and reflection. 11/10/2022 (C. Siewert)

Required reading: Charles Siewert, “Experience, Reflection, and Pre-Reflection”

4. Affective experience. 18/10/2022 (C. Siewert)

Required reading: Charles Siewert, “Chapter 14: Affective Experience” (book chapter draft)

5. Consciousness and value. 25/10/2022 (C. Siewert)

Required reading: Charles Siewert, “Consciousness: Value, Concern, and Respect”

6. Recap, sum-up, discussion. 08/11/2022 (A. Giustina)

Part II. The Value of Consciousness (with Uriah Kriegel)

7. The value of consciousness. 15/11/2022 (A. Giustina)

Required reading: Uriah Kriegel, “The Value of Consciousness”

8. The prudential value of consciousness. 22/11/2022 (A. Giustina)

Required reading: Uriah Kriegel, “Mood and Wellbeing”

9. The moral value of consciousness. 29/11/2022 (U. Kriegel)

Required reading: Uriah Kriegel, “Dignity and the Phenomenology of Recognition-Respect”

10. The epistemic value of consciousness. 06/12/2022 (U. Kriegel)

Required reading: Uriah Kriegel, “Phenomenal Grounds of Epistemic Value”

11. The aesthetic value of consciousness. 13/12/2022 (U. Kriegel)

Required reading: Uriah Kriegel, “A Fitting-Attitude Approach to Aesthetic Value?”

Bibliography

- Kriegel, Uriah. 2017. "Dignity and the Phenomenology of Recognition-Respect." In *Emotional Experiences: Ethical and Social Significance*, edited by J. J. Drummond and S. Rinofner-Kreidl, 121–36. London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- . 2019. "The Value of Consciousness." *Analysis* 79 (3): 503–20.
- . 2022a. "A Fitting-Attitude Approach to Aesthetic Value?" *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, August, ayac022.
- . 2022b. "Mood and Wellbeing." *Inquiry* 0 (0): 1–24.
- . forthcoming. "Phenomenal Grounds of Epistemic Value." *Philosophy Compass*.
- Siewert, Charles. 2021. "Consciousness: Value, Concern, and Respect." *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Mind* 1: 3–40.
- . forthcoming. "Affective Experience." In *Subjectivity and Understanding*, Chapter 14.
- . forthcoming. "Experience, Reflection, and Pre-Reflection." In *The Phenomenology of Self-Awareness and Conscious Subjects*. Routledge.
- . forthcoming. "In Search of a Basic Conception." In *Subjectivity and Understanding*, Chapter 4.