INTRODUCTION

Although most contemporary philosophers of mind endorse some form of materialism, there is a persistent difficulty that materialism must face; namely, the problem of conscious experience. As Daniel Dennett has written: “How could some information-processing event in my brain be the delicate warmth of the sunlight I felt falling on me? . . . It does seem as if the happenings that are my conscious thoughts and experiences cannot be brain happenings. . . .”¹ Some prominent philosophers believe that what “seemed” to Dennett to be the case is in fact the case, although Dennett himself – it must be emphasized – is not among them. In this course we will closely examine some of the current debates about consciousness. We will begin by looking at a classic presentation of the materialist position on the mind-body problem. Next we will take up some late 20th century arguments about consciousness that present challenges to materialism. The remainder of the course will consider Dennett’s most recent attempt to defend materialism against those challenges.

Caveat emptor: The material we will be covering this term does not represent a comprehensive overview of the philosophy of mind (that sort of overview is available in PHL 323). By focusing intensively on a single topic, however, you will have an opportunity to study the way in which a current philosophical issue develops through point / counterpoint dialogue. By the end of the semester, you should have a clear understanding of one major concern in contemporary philosophy of mind, and perhaps your own position on the subject will begin to crystallize. Although all of the readings should be accessible to serious students of philosophy who have met the course prerequisites, some of the assigned articles, culled from professional philosophy journals, will be challenging. Multiple readings of every assignment are advised; last-minute attempts to master course material are doomed to fail (all the more so when papers are due). Please bear in mind that the seminar format will depend heavily on full participation in thoughtful class discussion. It is essential, therefore, that everyone attend class regularly and be well-prepared.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Coursepack (distributed free on CD to each member of the class)
- Daniel C. Dennett, *Sweet Dreams: Philosophical Obstacles to a Theory of Consciousness*

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

- Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*. (Dennett’s prequel to *Sweet Dreams*, but by no means superseded by the latter work.)
- Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*. (An excellent overview of the major contemporary theories.)
- Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. (Discusses some of the phenomena described by Dennett, and offers a very sympathetic account of what it is like to face various neurological deficits.)
- David Lodge, *Thinks. . .* (An engaging “academic” novel that accords cameo roles to various philosophers of mind whom you’ll meet this semester.)

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 50% 5 formal essays (see page 4 below for details)
- 25% 5 Q&A papers (see page 4 below for details)
- 25% Class participation (see page 3 below for details)

COURSE FORMAT

Except for the first session, seminar meetings will be based on class discussion. Although I will obviously participate in the dialogue, the working assumption is that everyone’s contributions are worthwhile, and you may learn as much or more from your student colleagues as you do from me. In short, each class meeting should be regarded as a *cooperative* effort to come to grips with the issues of the day.

Seminar meetings will present an opportunity for you to improve your comprehension of the assigned material, to discover how others may have interpreted various points, and to contribute to the seminar’s understanding of the topics. Regular class participation from everyone, therefore, will be expected, encouraged, and rewarded.

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2 All are available in paperback. The first three are also on reserve in the library.
CLASS PARTICIPATION

This criterion has two components: (1) involvement in seminar discussions each week; (2) contributions to the class Web Board.

1. **Weekly Class Discussion.** This should be self-explanatory. As has already been emphasized, everyone is expected to be fully prepared for each class, and to make comments, raise questions, etc. – in short to contribute to our attempt to understand and evaluate each reading assignment to the fullest extent possible. Quality is much more important than quantity, but perpetual silence is not golden.

2. **Web Board Postings.** Everyone is expected to log on to the class discussion website, and to contribute significantly to it each week. Given that our seminar meets only once a week, the online discussion will serve as an extension of class discussion beyond each Thursday session. It will also provide an excellent forum for clarifying issues prior to writing your papers. You may contribute either by initiating new discussion threads or by responding to points that others have made. Web Board postings may be informal, and they may address virtually anything that is course-related (e.g., by requesting assistance, discussing a particular point that arose either in class or in a reading, proposing an argument for discussion). Everyone is expected to post at least one **substantial** message per week (contents such as “I liked x”, or “Yeah, I agree” don’t count as “substantial”). The Web Board is simple, and should be pretty intuitive. If you have any difficulty using it, please e-mail me right away for assistance.

COURSE POLICIES

- Papers must be submitted **in class** on the date due (no e-mail attachments). Note that you are required to submit a minimum of ten papers, but you have considerable flexibility concerning which ones you write.

- All work must be completed in order for you to receive course credit. Specifically, this means that you may not skip one component of the evaluation criteria, relying on the remaining ones to pull you through.

- Due to the seminar format and class participation requirement, faithful class attendance is a must. Multiple absences will result in a reduction of your course grade, and may result in a denial of credit for the course.

- It is essential that you be reachable by e-mail. Please follow the directions on page 8 of this syllabus to insure that you have regular access to your UM-Flint e-mail.

INTERNET RESOURCES

- Center for Consciousness Studies: [http://consciousness.arizona.edu/](http://consciousness.arizona.edu/)
- Dennett/Chalmers Debate: [http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/chalmersdeb3dft.htm](http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/chalmersdeb3dft.htm)
- Online Discussion of David Chalmers’ Work: [http://consc.net/discussions.html](http://consc.net/discussions.html)
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: [http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html](http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html) (See especially the entries on **Behaviorism**, **Consciousness**, **Functionalism**, **Identity Theory**)

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3 This is an update to the Website referred to on page 49, footnote #1, of *Sweet Dreams*. 
FORMAL ESSAYS

Five formal essays are required and you have some choice regarding them; the only restriction is that two of these essays must be completed by 10/4, and the remaining three between 10/11 and 12/6. Each essay should be in the vicinity of five to seven double-spaced pages (this is only a very rough guide, but anything appreciably shorter than five pages is likely to be inadequate).

Please insure that your formal essays conform to the following structure: (1) an introductory paragraph in which you provide an overview of the assignment’s content; (2) an exploration (full discussion) of points that you find particularly significant or interesting or puzzling; (3) critical reflections. Critical reflections may consist of any or all of the following: (a) an appraisal of arguments that seem deficient (you will need to indicate exactly why you regard them as deficient); (b) an appraisal of arguments that seem compelling (you must indicate why they are compelling); (c) a discussion of exactly how the assignment you are writing about connects with other material you have read for the course (essays written later in the term will naturally provide the greatest opportunities for this).

Every assignment is associated with a set of Study Questions. Your formal essays should contain identifiable answers to those questions, but should not simply consist of unconnected short answers. Rather, your essays should be constructed along the lines indicated in the preceding paragraph. Each essay should be fluid and self-contained, and should be intelligible to someone who has not read the assignment. Don’t write with me in mind as your audience; rather, imagine an intelligent reader who is unfamiliar the material that you are discussing.

If you are especially keen on the material, or a glutton for punishment, you may submit more than five formal essays, and if you do so only your best efforts will be counted (i.e., your best two essays written by 10/4, and your best three essays written between 10/11 and 12/6).

Q&A PAPERS

On any five of the dates when you don’t submit a formal essay, you are required to hand in a paper that explicitly addresses the Study Questions. In contrast to formal essays, your Q&A papers may simply number each question and answer. Nevertheless, your answers should be as expansive as possible; with rare exceptions, you should avoid responses consisting only of a few sentences. And in instances where you are asked to provide your own views, make sure that you support your response with arguments. Unreasoned opinions don’t constitute philosophy.

You may hand in more than five Q&A papers, in which case only your highest five scores will be counted.
ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

(Coursepack readings are labeled “CP1”, “CP2”, etc.; Dennett’s book is abbreviated SD)

8/30  Introduction and Course Overview (no reading assignment)

9/6  J.J.C. Smart, “Sensations and Brain Processes” [CP1]
    Study Questions:  (i) Why do you suppose that Smart focused on sensations and brain processes rather than (e.g.) memories and brain processes?  (ii) What is Smart’s main reason for endorsing materialism?  (iii) What is the primary purposes of the “objections and replies” portion of Smart’s article?  (iv) Briefly discuss each of Smart’s objections and replies (if you are lost on any of them, post a message on the Web Board).  (v) In what sense is the “brain process thesis” a scientific hypothesis, and in what sense is it not?

9/13  Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” [CP2]
    Study Questions:  (i) Nagel proposes that “an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism” (p. 436).  Is this plausible?  (Why or why not?)  (ii) What role does the distinction between “subjective” and “objective” play in Nagel’s development of the difficulty he sees with physicalism (note that this point is developed over a number of pages)?  (iii) What is the basic point of Nagel’s “bat” example?  (iv) If rainbows and lightning can be understood in physical terms, why can’t conscious experience be similarly understood?  (v) What is Nagel’s ultimate conclusion about the truth or falsity of physicalism?

9/20  Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia” (skip Section II, pp. 130-131) [CP3]
    Study Questions:  (i) What does Jackson mean by “quailia”?  (ii) Explain the title of Jackson’s article (this will require a careful reading of Section IV).  (iii) How does the Knowledge Argument purport to establish a conclusion about what actually exists (as opposed to what we believe or know to exist)?  (iv) Evaluate Jackson’s criticism of Nagel on p. 132, penultimate paragraph.  (v) Explain the overall role of the three numbered objections and replies in Section IV of Jackson’s paper, and then analyze each of them.  (vi) Discuss the “understandable response” (p. 135, 2nd full paragraph) and Jackson’s reply to it.

9/27  Colin McGinn, “Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?” [CP4]
    Study Questions:  (i) What does McGinn mean by “cognitive closure”?  (ii) If we are cognitively closed with respect to some property $P$, what reason could we have for thinking that

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Note: The term *qualia* is plural; the singular is *quale*.

You may also find it helpful to consult the first paragraph of the entry for “Epiphenomenalism” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (see p. 4 of this syllabus for the Web address).
P actually exists? (iii) What role do the limits of introspection play in McGinn’s argument that we could not grasp a theory of experiences that were alien to us (e.g., those of a bat)? (iv) Why does McGinn think that future brain science can’t yield a solution to the mind-body problem? (v) What is McGinn’s “solution” to the mind-body problem? (vi) How does McGinn’s overall position compare and contrast with the views of Nagel and Jackson?

10/4  David Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness” [CP5]

Study Questions: (i) Explain Chalmers’ distinction between the “easy problem” and the “hard problem”. (ii) Why do mechanistic explanations work for “easy problems” but not for the “hard problem”? (iii) What does Chalmers see as the common flaw in all physicalist attempts to provide an “extra ingredient” to account for conscious experience? (Why couldn’t some future physicalist theory do the job?) (iv) What does Chalmers mean by “nonreductive explanation”? (v) What role do Chalmers’ two principles (pp. 212-215) play in developing a theory of consciousness? (vi) What role does information play in Chalmers’ theory, and what are the far-reaching implications of this? (Might those implications be regarded as a reductio ad absurdum of Chalmers’ proposal?)

10/11  D. C. Dennett, “Intentional Systems” [CP6]

Study Questions: (i) What is the “Intentional stance”, and what advantages does it offer over the “design stance” and the “physical stance”? (ii) Dennett writes (on pp 100-101) that “the guiding or challenging question that defines work in the philosophy of mind is this: are there mental treasures that cannot be purchased with Intentional coin?”. How would Jackson and Chalmers answer that question (be specific)? (iii) Why does Dennett regard introspection as useless for adjudicating between alternative ascriptions of belief to an organism?

10/18  SD, Chapter 1

Study Questions: (i) What is the significance of the Steinberg cartoon on the cover of Dennett’s book? (ii) What exactly is meant by (a) the Zombic Hunch; (b) Zombism? (iii) Dennett claims that “We are all susceptible to the Zombic Hunch”. Are you? Explain.

10/25  SD, Chapter 2 (Before you start this chapter, review CP2, CP5, and Section I of CP6)

Study Questions: (i) What is the point of Dennett’s discussion of Martian scientists (Section 1 of the chapter)? (ii) What is “heterophenomenology”? Take this slowly, and be prepared to interpret and explain the following sentence: “Heterophenomenology allows us to proceed with our catalog of a subject’s beliefs leaving it open whether any or all of them are Chalmers-style phenomenological beliefs or mere zombie-beliefs” (p. 46).

11/1  SD, Chapter 3

Study Questions: (i) Dennett describes a few scenarios that would count as “cheating” in the performance of a magic trick such as the “Indian Rope Trick”. Why are those scenarios “cheats”? (ii) Can you formulate a criterion for a “proper magic trick” (a/k/a one without “cheats”)? (iii) What does the discussion of magic have to do with consciousness?

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6 For example, why should we suppose that consciousness arises from some property of the brain? Why not suppose instead that consciousness requires miraculous divine intervention?
11/8  SD, Chapter 4

(i) Why does Dennett regards qualia as “elusive”? Do you agree? (ii) What problem does “change blindness” allegedly pose for the concept of qualia? (Which of the answers on p. 85 do you favor in response to Dennett’s question about the two “kitchen” photos?) (iii) What is the difference between the “Clapgrass” case in Section 3, and the “kitchen” case in Section 2? (iv) Which way would you “jump in describing his [Clapgras’] predicament”? (v) Evaluate Dennett’s argument (p. 102) about plants, bees, bats, and birds. Does it apply also to people?

11/15  SD, Chapter 5 (review CP3 once again before starting on this chapter)

Study Questions: (i) Assess Dennett’s “blue banana” story as a response to Jackson. (ii) Why exactly does Dennett think that Mary will not be “surprised” by seeing her first red (or blue) object after being released from her room? (iii) What would Jackson say about “Swamp Mary”? (iv) Dennett rejects the complaint that “Robots don’t have color experiences” (p. 125). Does this mean that he thinks that robots do have color experiences? (v) When “locked RoboMary” manages to put herself into state B, what has she gained over what she had in state A? And what would Jackson say about state B?

11/29  SD, Chapter 6

Study Questions: (i) Read and re-read the quoted passage on page 132 until you can explain it in your own words. What connection to you see between points (3), (4), and (5) in that passage? (ii) What is meant by the claim that “consciousness is clout”? (iii) Explain the following passage, and comment on how it highlights what Dennett regards as the proper subject matter for a science of consciousness:

Thus if some phenomenologist becomes convinced by her own (first-) personal experience – however encountered, transformed, reflected upon – of the existence of a feature of consciousness in need of explanation and accommodation within her theory, her conviction that this is so is itself a fine datum in need of explanation, by her or by others, but the truth of her conviction must not be presupposed by science. [SD, pp. 147-148]

(iv) How is the above quotation challenged by the passage quoted from Chalmers on the top of p. 149 of SD? (v) What does it mean to say that qualia are “informational superabundance”? Does this strike you as plausible?

12/6  SD, Chapters 7 and 8

Study Questions. (i) What does Dennett mean by the “echo theory of consciousness”? I.e., what is he asserting, and what is he denying? (Hint: Consider carefully the claim that consciousness is more like fame than like television.) (ii) In Section 2 of Chapter 7, Dennett countenances “episodic memory”. What does he mean by this – is he countenancing “phenomenal consciousness”, or is episodic memory entirely propositional? (iii) Explain the relevance of Chapter 8’s title to the central topic of that chapter.

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7 Note that the parenthetical numbers in that passage follow rather than precede the points to which they apply. Dennett’s commentary on pp. 132-134 should help you understand the passage.
Reading and Forwarding Your UM-Flint E-mail

Reading your UM-Flint E-mail Online

E-mail has become an essential tool for university communications. Many students, however, do not check their university e-mail regularly, perhaps because they use some other e-mail account (such as Earthlink, Yahoo!, or Hotmail). But reading your UM-Flint e-mail online is no harder than using those other online e-mail accounts. You can access it through Microsoft Outlook or you can read it by using your web browser. In the latter case, just go to https://mail.umflint.edu/exchange and login. (Note that the address starts with https rather than the more familiar http.)

Forwarding Your UM-Flint E-mail to Another Account

If you wish, you can also easily set up your UM-Flint account so it will automatically forward e-mail to the account of your choice. (Note: ITS cautions that some users have experienced problems doing this, so proceed at your own risk. It is possible that you will lose forwarded e-mail, and ITS takes no responsibility for such cases.)

To set up e-mail forwarding, log into your UM-Flint e-mail account using the Internet address given above. Make sure that you use the Premium Client Access Level (that option is already checked by default). Once you are logged in, note the bottom left of your screen, where you will find an icon labeled “Rules”. Click on that icon, and then follow these steps:

1. Click on the Rules icon. A new box will open up.
2. At the top of the newly opened box, click New…
3. If you wish, you can enter a name for the rule in Rule Name (optional)
4. At the bottom, select the option Forward it to and then type in the email address you want your email forwarded to. (Notice that you have the option of also leaving a copy of each incoming message on your UM-Flint account; that option is the default, and I highly recommend that you use this option.)
5. Click on the Save and Close button.

That’s all there is to it. From that point onward, mail sent to your UM-Flint e-mail address will automatically be forwarded to the address that you have specified.

In this course I will assume that you are reachable via your UM-Flint e-mail account. This means that you should either check that account regularly or else forward your UM-Flint e-mail to an account that you do check regularly.

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8 Unfortunately, this procedure will only work if you use Internet Explorer; Firefox will not work.