
The Nature and Origins of Consciousness

IDS-101 §25 (College Colloquium) • Fritz Ruehr • Willamette University • Fall 2017

Official course description

We think of human beings as different from animals because we are conscious, thinking beings, possessing language, a sense of self, and free will. But where did consciousness come from, and how does it work? Many people have tackled these questions over the millennia, but some of the most intriguing ideas were presented by psychologist Julian Jaynes in the 1970's: Jaynes described the development of consciousness as an almost cultural phenomenon, relating it to language, social hierarchies, brain structure, and the "voices of the gods". His ideas are compelling and well-defended, but so outrageous that they are difficult to take seriously, leading to a wide variation in reactions to his work. Jaynes' influence nevertheless continues to this day, for example as the basis for the development of "android consciousness" in the popular TV series *Westworld*. We will read Jaynes' original book and several related articles, as well as some critical works attacking and supporting his ideas. We will also read a number of other authors to explore related topics in consciousness and the philosophy of mind; the origins of language and writing; brain-hemisphere specialization ("left brain/right brain"); and academic controversy.

Instructor

Name: **Fritz Ruehr**

Office: 208 Ford Hall

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Office hours: **Th 1:00-2:00; Fri 11:30-12:30***; by appt.; or just drop by!

(* see also a posted schedule outside my office door)

Writing Associate: **John Paul Welch** (jpwelch@willamette.edu)

Logistics and attendance (see also calendar below)

Regular lectures: MWF 12:40pm-1:40pm Ford 222

Opening Days: Wed 23 Aug 4:00-5:30 Ford 204
Thu 24 Aug
 ▶▶▶ Convo! 10:30-12:00 WU Quad
 class 1:30-3:00 Ford 204
Fri 25 Aug 10:30-12:00 Ford 204

Students are expected to attend all section meetings (and convocation)! You are in any case responsible for all content, changes in assignments or policies, etc., which are made during the course of scheduled classes (i.e., if you are sick and unable to attend class, *you are responsible* for e-mailing or otherwise contacting me about things you may have missed). I will try to make important announcements available by e-mail or a web space.

Note: participation in class discussions will be a significant factor in your grade!

Texts

Our main "textbook" will be Julian Jaynes' *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. I will also make other, shorter readings (such as the Daniel Dennett article sent to you over the summer) available by web link, hand-out, or library reserve holdings during the course of the semester.

Assignments and grading

Grades will be based on essays/papers; other, shorter assignments; and in-class participation (including at least one presentation). I reserve the right to include a few “pop quizzes” to encourage reading. (These quizzes would address basic knowledge about the reading and would be given before discussion in order to encourage preparation for class.)

I plan to give three graded essay/paper assignments of increasing length, each with a required preliminary draft. The relative weights of the various components of your final grade will be:

- 20% for the first essay/paper;
- 15% for the second essay/paper;
- 25% for the third essay/paper;
- 20% for a variety of shorter, sometimes in-class assignments; and
- 20% for class participation.

Collaboration and related issues

All essays and other written work you hand in should be your own. You are encouraged of course to use other peoples' works as sources, but you should always cite specific pieces of text you quote either using quotation marks (for shorter bits) or setting off the quotation indented from the rest of your text (for longer pieces). If you get significant ideas for a paper from a fellow student, acknowledge their ideas with a “personal communication” citation. You are allowed (and encouraged) to seek help from other students for general study purposes, but you should never take credit for the work of others.

For more, see standard college policies on **Honor Code and Plagiarism** noted below.

Student Learning Objectives

To develop students' abilities to read closely. Course texts include eight graphic novels, a technical textbook, and other occasional readings to be determined dynamically. Students will also be reading and commenting on one another's written drafts.

To develop students' abilities to discuss reflectively. Most of our class periods are organized around discussion that is informed in turn by the assigned readings, or other material shared in class. Students will also be expected to attend and participate in various co-curricular activities and events.

To develop students' abilities to write effectively. There will be three writing assignments, each of which will go through a process of drafting, and receive feedback from the Professor, the Writing Associate, and peers in class. There will also be occasional informal in-class writing.

To develop students' abilities to think critically. Ultimately, the measure of the reading, discussion, and writing undertaken for the class is that students become more adept at making arguments supported by claims, reasons, and evidence and more agile in anticipating and responding appropriately to counter-arguments and implications.

Disability Accommodation

(See also <<http://www.willamette.edu/dept/policies/selected/students/disability.html>>)

Please tell me about any disabilities that will affect your participation in this course. I will respect any accommodations authorized by the Office of Disabilities Services.

Religious Accommodation

(See also <<http://www.willamette.edu/dept/chaplain/events/holidays.html>>)

Willamette University recognizes the value of religious practice and strives to accommodate students' commitment to their religious traditions whenever possible. When conflicts between holy days or other religious practice and academic scheduling arise, every effort should be made to allow students to adhere to their tradition, including, when possible, excusing class absences and allowing make-up work. A student anticipating the need to miss a class for religious reasons should alert the faculty member within the first two weeks of the semester, and the two of them should determine the next course of action. Any unresolved difficulty should be referred to the Office of the Chaplains.

Time Commitment

(See also <<http://www.willamette.edu/cla/dean/ethic/index.html>>)

"Willamette's Credit Hour Policy holds that for every hour of class time there is an expectation of 2-3 hours work outside of class. Thus, for a class meeting three days a week you should anticipate spending 6-9 hours outside of class engaged in course-related activities. Examples include study time, reading and homework assignments, research projects, and group work."

Honor Code and Plagiarism

(See also <http://www.willamette.edu/cla/catalog/resources/policies/categories/plagiarism_cheating.php>)

"We will hold ourselves to the highest standards of moral, academic excellence. We will proudly submit only our original work. We will never attempt to give ourselves or others an unfair advantage. We will commit to upholding our honor and the value of our work. Through this commitment we will serve as an example to our peers."