

# PHL 390

## Dreams and Consciousness

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### MEETING INFORMATION

Section 101: TR 9:30-10:45  
Classroom: HUMB 0114

Instructor: Allison Krile Thornton  
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Office: HUMB 133  
Office Hours: TBD; or by appointment

### DESCRIPTION

“Dreams and Consciousness” is an interdisciplinary honors seminar, taught by me, Dr. Krile Thornton, a philosopher, with regular lectures by Dr. Shelley-Tremblay, the chair of South’s psychology department. In addition to Dr. Shelley-Tremblay’s visits, we also plan to bring in several guest speakers from a variety of institutions and fields, including psychology, neuroscience, neurosurgery, philosophy, and theology. Throughout the semester, we will explore how the psychology and neuroscience of dreaming shape our understanding of human nature, consciousness, knowledge, and spirituality.

The themes of the course—dreams and consciousness—are linked to enduring questions like: What does it mean to be human?; Is sense-based knowledge achievable?; Under what conditions are we responsible for our actions?; What are legitimate sources of divine revelation? At the same time, the nature, function, origin, and neurological basis of dreams and consciousness continue to raise interesting questions in psychology and neuroscience. In other words, the themes of this course are at once deeply connected to who we are as people and the subjects of exciting scientific research. This course will take advantage of those built-in connections dreams and consciousness have to both science and philosophy, considering the ways in which the findings of one field shed light on the insights of another.

More specifically, at the heart of the course will be an exploration of the human person as embodied. In this exploration, we will draw from work in philosophy, theological anthropology, experimental and clinical psychology, and cognitive science, and we’ll consider how the science of dreams and consciousness shapes and draws from an embodied view of the human person.

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you will

1. Understand, engage, and evaluate philosophical texts and ideas
2. Integrate perspectives from philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience
3. Write clearly, effectively, and critically

### TEXT

All materials will be posted on Canvas.

## ASSESSMENT

### 3 Exams (40% of total grade)

- The exams are equally weighted.
- The first two exams are not cumulative; the final is.
- The exams will be taken at home in light of the circumstances.
- There is a review day built into the schedule prior to each exam. In addition, I will always provide a study guide.

### 6 Response Papers (40% of total grade)

- Throughout the course you will build an “intellectual diary” out of response papers based on the readings, our in-class discussions, and our guest speaker series. These papers require creative and critical thinking, not merely an accurate reporting or summary of what we read and discussed. You are expected to think with and against the texts and contribute your own ideas.
- Each response paper will be 1000-1500 words long.
- You will submit two response papers per unit, generally due the class period before an exam.
- I will provide specific prompts at least two weeks prior to the deadlines.

### Final Creative Project (20% of total grade)

- You will produce a final creative project that you will present to the class on either 4/27 or 4/29.
- In this project, you’ll pull from what we’ve learned about mind, dreams, the brain, personhood, identity, etc. from throughout the semester, creatively bringing it into a fresh context and exploring it with a wide range of tools.
- Possibilities include making a website, diorama, poetry, photography, screenplay, interview, Minecraft world, adult coloring book, recipe/menu/food, illustrated children’s book, podcast series, short story, etc.

## GRADING SCHEMA

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>
90 – 100	80 – 89.9	70 - 79.9	60 - 69.9	0 – 59.9

## DEATHTRAPS

### Absences

- You have four “sick days”—or class periods you can miss without it directly affecting your grade.
- Nearly any reason for missing a class period uses a sick day. There is no direct consequence to missing class beyond using up a sick day.
- **HOWEVER:** if you miss more than four classes, your final grade will be adjusted down by 2% for every additional class you miss.

### Plagiarizing

- You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is.
- You are responsible for avoiding it.

- If you plagiarize on an assignment, you will get a zero on the assignment, even if you did not know you were plagiarizing or know what plagiarism is.
- If you plagiarize on an assignment, I will report the fact that you plagiarized to the appropriate authority.

### Cheating

- Don't cheat.
- If you cheat, you will get a zero on whatever you cheated on and no opportunity to make it up.
- If you cheat, I will report the fact that you cheated to the appropriate authority.

## POLICIES

**Honor code:** Each student is expected to read, understand, and abide by the university's Code of Student Conduct.

**Technology:** Cell phones, laptops, tablets, etc. must be kept out of sight and out of use during class except for when we use them for ICAs. If you require accommodations that require such technology, please talk to me about it.

**Accommodations:** If you have a condition that interferes with your ability to participate, you are entitled to accommodations which I take seriously and am happy to provide. Please discuss them with me or contact the Office of Student Disability Services at [disabilityservices@southalabama.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@southalabama.edu) to figure out the next step.

## PRELIMINARIES

1/18

### I.1 Intro & FAQ

Tuesday/Thursday: Our course page on Canvas

## FIRST UNIT: CONSCIOUSNESS

1/25

### I.2 What is philosophy (and psychology) of mind?

Tuesday: "Consciousness in context: antecedents and origins" by Marcel Kinsbourne, *Mind and Language*

Dr. ST lecture: basic psychology and neuroscience of dreams and consciousness

Thursday: "What is it like to be a bat?" by Thomas Nagel, *The Philosophical Review*

"Nagel's 'What is it like to be a bat' argument against physicalism" by Amy Kind *Just the Arguments*

Optional: "Big unknowns: what is consciousness?" Podcast, *The Guardian*

2/1

### I.3 Is the mind a soul?

Tuesday: *Meditations I, II, VI*, Descartes

"What can Avicenna teach us about the mind-body problem?" by Peter Adamson, *Aeon*

Thursday: "Princess Elisabeth and the mind-body problem" by Jen McWeeney

Excerpts from *The Concept of Mind* by Gilbert Ryle

"Science of the soul: 'I think therefore I am' losing force" by Cornelia Dean, *NYT*

Optional: "Jellyfish, sexbots and the solipsism problem" by John Horgan, *Scientific American*

"Daniel Dennett's Science of the Soul" by Joshua Rothman

2/8

### I.4 Is the mind a body?

Tuesday: "Is consciousness a brain process?" by U.T. Place

Thursday: "The Hornswoggle Problem" by Patricia Churchland

Optional: "How the brain perceives color could explain consciousness" by Michael Graziano

"What did Mary know?" by Marina Gerner, *Philosophy Now*

"Danie's Dennett's Science of the Soul" by Joshua Rothman, *The New Yorker*

2/15

### I.5 Where does consciousness come from?

Tuesday: NO CLASS || NO READINGS

Thursday: "Minimal neuroanatomy for a conscious brain: honing in on the networks constituting consciousness by Morsella et al., *Neural Networks*

Guest lecture: Christopher Baggott (neurosurgery) on neuroanatomy of consciousness

Optional: "A framework for consciousness" by Francis Crick and Christof Koch, *Nature*

2/22

## I.6 REVIEW AND EXAM WEEK

Tuesday: "The philosophy of phenomenal consciousness: an introduction" by Zoe Drayson

Review Day

Response Papers 1 & 2 Due

Thursday: EXAM DAY

## SECOND UNIT: DREAMS

3/1

### 2.1 How do dreams, cognition, and philosophy of mind relate?

Tuesday: "At the root of embodied cognition: cognitive science meets neurophysiology" by Francesca Garbarini and Mauro Adenzato, *Brain and Cognition*

Dr. ST lecture: basic psychology and neuroscience of dreams and consciousness

Thursday: "How Linguistic Metaphor Scaffolds Reasoning" by Thibodeau et al., *Trends in Cognitive Science*

Guest lecture: Kate Finley (philosophy) on linguistic metaphor and embodied cognition

Optional: "A brief guide to embodied cognition: why you are not your brain", *Scientific American*

Amy Pollock's "Embodied Cognition" photography project

3/8

### 2.2 What is embodied cognition?

Tuesday: "Probabilistic Epigenesis" by Gilbert Gotleib, *Developmental Science*

"All Perception Engages the Tensegrity-Based Haptic Medium" by Patrick Cabe, *Ecological Psychology*

Guest lecture: Al Hajnal (psychology) on embodied cognition

Thursday: No new readings

Optional: "Your brain hallucinates your conscious reality" Ted Talk by Anil Seth

"To sleep, perchance to dream" Crash Course Philosophy

"On Dreams" by Sigmund Freud

3/15 **2.3 What are dreams?**

*Tuesday:* "Brené with Emily and Amelia Nagoski on Burnout and How to Complete the Stress Cycle" from *Unlocking Us with Brené Brown*

"Top 5 Famous Scientific Discoveries Made in Dreams" from *Fact2Fact*, YouTube

"Letting go of the past: EMDR" from *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk

*Thursday:* "Looking for the self: phenomenology, neurophysiology, and philosophical significance of drug-induced ego dissolution" by Raphael Milliere, *Frontiers in Neuroscience*

*Optional:* "Rosalind Cartwright's Obituary" *New York Times*, March 15 2021

3/22 **2.4 What do dreams tell us?**

*Tuesday:* "Action and perception in the rubber hand illusion" by Riemer et al., *Exp Brain Res*

Dr. ST lecture: basic psychology and neuroscience of dreams and consciousness

*Thursday:* No new readings

Guest lecture: Erin Kidd (theology) on Harriet Tubman's dreams and moral formation

3/29 **2.5 EXAM WEEK**

*Tuesday:* Review Day

Response Papers 3 & 4 Due

*Thursday:* EXAM DAY

THIRD UNIT: PERSONAL IDENTITY

4/5 **3.1 What might we mean by personal identity?**

*Tuesday:* "Complete your stress cycle" day, drawing on the work of Emily and Amelia Nagoski

*Thursday:* NO CLASS || NO READINGS

4/12 **3.2 Are we bodies or are we souls?**

*Tuesday:* No new readings.

*Guest lecture: Edgar Finn (psychiatry) on personality disorders*

*Thursday:* Chapter 7, "Consciousness: Confessions of a Romantic Reductionist", by Christof Koch

*Optional:* "Did my neurons make me do it?" *Brain Science Podcast*

4/18 **3.3 TBD + Review**

*Tuesday:* "Life is a coin with one side" Act 2 of the episode "Where there's a will" on *This American Life*.

"A famous argument against free will has been debunked" by Bahar Gholipour, *The Atlantic*

*Thursday:* Review

*Optional:* "Just desserts", *Aeon* (a debate between Daniel Dennett and Greg Caruso)

"Revisiting the fault line" *Radiolab* podcast

"There's no such thing as free will" by Stephen Cave, *The Atlantic*

4/26 **3.4 STUDENT PRESENTATIONS WEEK**

5/3 **EXAM TIME**

Response papers 5 & 6 due on Tuesday 5/4

Final Exam on Thursday 5/6

\*Note that the syllabus is subject to change and likely will be changed. You will always be given advance notice if readings will be added or subtracted or if there will be any alteration in due dates or assignments.\*