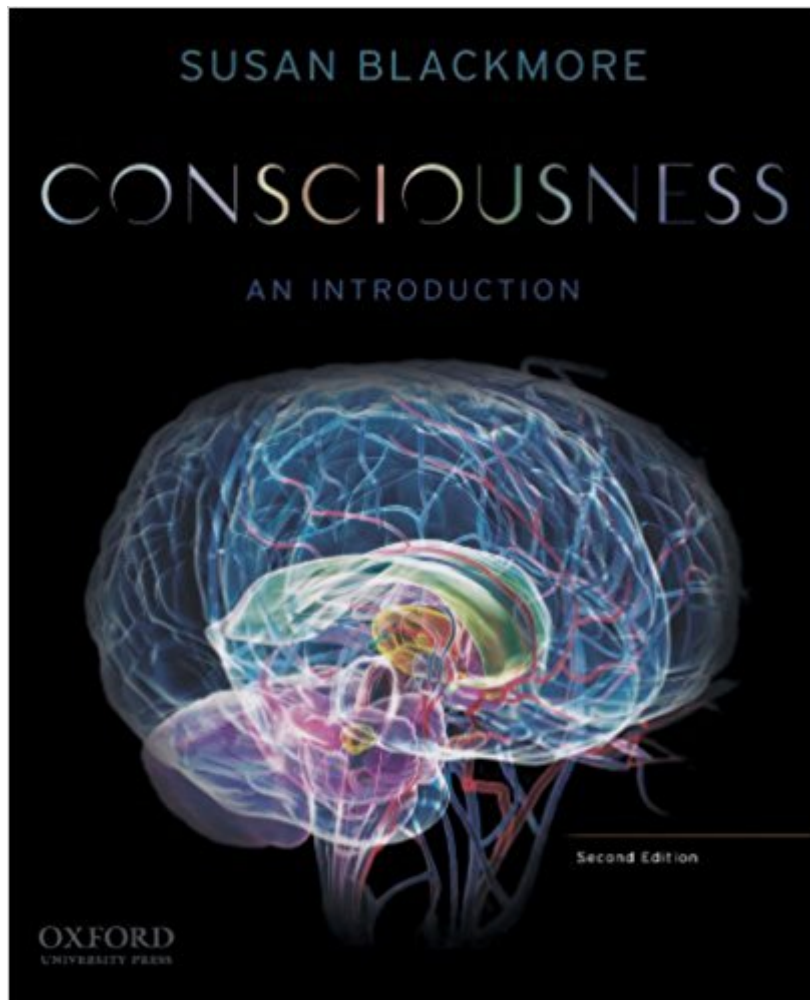




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Consciousness: An Introduction (2nd Ed.)



Synopsis

Now in a new edition, this innovative text is the first volume to bring together all the major theories of consciousness studies--from those rooted in traditional Western philosophy to those coming out of neuroscience, quantum theory, and Eastern philosophy. Broadly interdisciplinary, *Consciousness: An Introduction*, Second Edition, is divided into nine sections that examine such topics as how subjective experiences arise from objective brain processes, the basic neuroscience and neuropathology of consciousness, altered states of consciousness, mystical experiences and dreams, and the effects of drugs and meditation. It also discusses the nature of self, the possibility of artificial consciousness in robots, and the question of whether or not animals are conscious.

PEDAGOGICAL FEATURES* Profiles of important philosophers, psychologists, neuroscientists, and biologists involved in consciousness studies* "Concept" text boxes that elucidate specific aspects of consciousness* "Practice" and "Activity" text boxes that encourage students to engage in practical exercises in class and at home* Bold marginal quotations that emphasize key ideas, and suggestions for further reading

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Customer Reviews

"The main strength of *Consciousness* is that it covers all the cool stuff, all the consciousness phenomena that really capture the imagination. A great virtue is that the book is current; there hasn't been anything I wanted to talk about that isn't in it. You bet I will adopt the second edition."--William Lycan, University of North Carolina

A strong virtue of *Consciousness* is that it is thoroughly

interdisciplinary. Terrific coverage of attention and memory, empirical stuff, the unity of consciousness, damaged brains, hallucinations, and dreams--really first-rate material."--Andrew Pessin, Connecticut College"Consciousness is an excellent companion to a primary source reader in a philosophy of mind course, or a stand-alone text in an introductory course on consciousness."--Lisa Portmess, Gettysburg College

Susan Blackmore is a writer, lecturer, and Visiting Professor at the University of Plymouth, UK. She is the author of *Conversations on Consciousness* (2006), *A Very Short Introduction to Consciousness* (2005), and *The Meme Machine* (1999), all published by Oxford University Press.

This book is a must-buy for the student or layman interested in consciousness. Blackmore guides the reader on an exhilarating crashcourse through all the issues relevant to the problem of consciousness, from Descartes to the thought of contemporary scientists and philosophers. This book has a number of unique strengths. Most importantly, Blackmore has managed to distill to their essences the various features of what is often a baffling subject, and writes in clear, lively prose. This alone would justify the book's purchase. Another strength is her focus not just on the speculative, but on the hard science relevant to consciousness. She frequently makes reference to (and explains) experiments illuminating the characteristics and activities of the mind/brain. Blackmore also does a good job at introducing prominent thinkers in the area of consciousness by including photos, mini-bios, and explaining their work and why it is important. Blackmore seems very clever, and overall is quite fair in her assessment of the competing strands of thought within this field. There is only one peculiarity (whether it is a fault or not depends on perspective) that concerns me: almost every discussion of any aspect of consciousness seems to include, and often concludes with, entirely uncritical descriptions of what Tufts philosopher Daniel Dennett thinks about the issue. This is odd, because virtually everyone else's ideas are subjected to tough questioning by Blackmore. As if to punctuate this seemingly uncritical embrace of Dennett, Blackmore even uses photos of - guess who? - Daniel Dennett to construct a montage demonstrating blind spots (see page 82). As a kind of *prima facie* indicator of whether there was indeed a dramatically lopsided reliance on, or deference to, Dennett, I turned to the index to count up the number of pages in which various scientists and philosophers were referred to or discussed in the book. To be generous, I disregarded thinkers mentioned only in passing, and focused on eleven prominent names (Chalmers, Churchland, Dawkins, Damasio, etc.). The average number of index pages for each thinker was fourteen, while the total number of pages for Dennett was....71!

No one else even comes close to half the citations. Despite the real achievements of this book, Blackmore's handling of Dennett might be of concern to some readers, who, like I have, have gotten the sense that at this point, it is far too early for the construction and reinforcement of any orthodoxy or dogma; while many theories have been proposed, we all still seem to be feeling about largely in the dark vis-à-vis this most mysterious of fields. However, as is again made clear in quotations from him in the book, Dennett seems (sometimes gleefully) predisposed to dogmatic, Cardinal Ratzinger-like pronouncements about almost every aspect of this science (note, for example, the telling title of his 1991 book, "Consciousness Explained" [sigh]). He often seems to advance his arguments using rhetorical features that place them stylistically in with arguments made by people like Jimmy Swaggart and Pat Robertson. (Perhaps this is an inevitable consequence of a commitment to any fundamentalist, absolutist world-explaining ideology [whether theist or atheist, like Dennett embraces]; but since, as I mentioned, this is only the dawn of consciousness studies, who knows? Perhaps future research will finally reveal whether the relentless arrogance and dogmatism of Dawkins and Dennett and Swaggart and Robertson are indeed attributable to identical neurological processes in the brain, showing all four humans to be of the same unique type, no matter how much they might all loathe being associated with each other; and depending on how the free will debate turns out, we might even be able to find out whether any of them can even be held accountable for the general intolerability of their pedagogical styles). This is not to say that Dennett is wrong about everything; he may turn out to be right about everything. All I mean to say is that, given the current less-than-airtight evidence for Dennett's ideas, and a modus operandi that suggests he may not exactly be open-minded, Blackmore's attachment to Dennett ought to be considered by readers. If we buy a book called "Economics: An Introduction", and we see that of all the economic authorities cited, Karl Marx has over five times the average amount of citations and is the only one treated uncritically, we would have every reason to suspect that possibly a prior commitment by the author has inhibited her ability, or even desire, to evaluate or present Marx's ideas sans bias, or even sans what psychologist Daniel Goleman calls mental lacunae. If, as seems indisputable, Blackmore thinks Dennett is closer to the truth on everything than everyone else, can we see the requisite hard evidence that he is? And if this evidence does not exist yet, should Blackmore's endorsement of Dennett not just be made explicit so we can take that into consideration as we try to form our own conclusions about things? In fairness, I should say that Dennett, for better or for worse, is a leading voice in consciousness studies, so one might as well become familiar with his ideas (I won't spoil the surprise). Despite the Dennett issue (Blackmore and Dennett might argue "because" of it), the truth is that this book is still by far the best that I know of

for introducing the emerging science of consciousness. Blackmore might be twitterpated with the chest-thumping Dennett, but she's very smart and a very good writer, and covers pretty much all the bases that need to be covered in an intelligible way. That's why I'm giving this book five stars. Good luck

Susan Blackmore has written an excellent book dealing with one of the most challenging problems confronting human kind as we enter the 21st century: What is consciousness and how do we explain it. The book examines consciousness from myriad viewpoints; philosophical, psychological, and biological. Ms. Blackmore presents a plethora of fascinating topics such as: What is it like to be a bat?, What are we actually seeing?, What is it like to be an animal?, Could a machine be conscious?, What are the neural correlates of consciousness?, How do we distinguish between reality and imagination?, and, finally, How are Buddhism and consciousness related? All the key players involved in the study of consciousness such as Rene Descartes, David Chalmers, Patricia Churchland, Daniel Dennett, Alan Turing, Francis Crick, Roger Penrose, John Eccles, etc. are found in this wonderful book. Each chapter contains profiles, concepts, activities, and practices, and readings. The references are excellent. And Ms. Blackmore writes in clear, concise prose. If you have ever wondered what consciousness may be, then this is the book for you whether you plan to use it for a college course or simply read it yourself. This is a great and fun read! Don't delay; buy a copy today and the price is right!!!

Best, most fascinating textbook I have ever read. Textbooks are boring right? Not this one. And I loved the cartoon images drawn by her son.

Outstanding book!

Not easy reading but understandable to some extent.

Susan Blackmore is sharp and relentless in her quest to unveil confusion and misunderstanding regarding what consciousness is and what -or who- the self is. Her own views take unmistakable shape as she reviews and examines -critically- the views of some of the most relevant authors on the matter. She includes a section on meditation and the Buddhist view on consciousness and the self. She is one of very few authors that dares take a challenging stance regarding common misunderstandings of the Buddha's teachings. After reading this book, the Buddhist teaching of

anatta (no substance, or no-self) reveals a radical and liberating scenario.

Even if you do not find the topic to be the most fascinating subject in philosophy, psychology and neuroscience, you will be surprised and enlightened on nearly every page of this excellent textbook. Practical exercises to expand your understanding of your own experience are combined with recent experimental studies and cutting-edge theory. Best of all, the reader is given everything she needs to overcome the illusion of consciousness altogether! Read the book, ponder the ideas it contains, & practice the exercises. Your life will change.

Blackmore provides a readable, comprehensive introduction to the field. A great book for getting grounded in philosophy of consciousness.

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