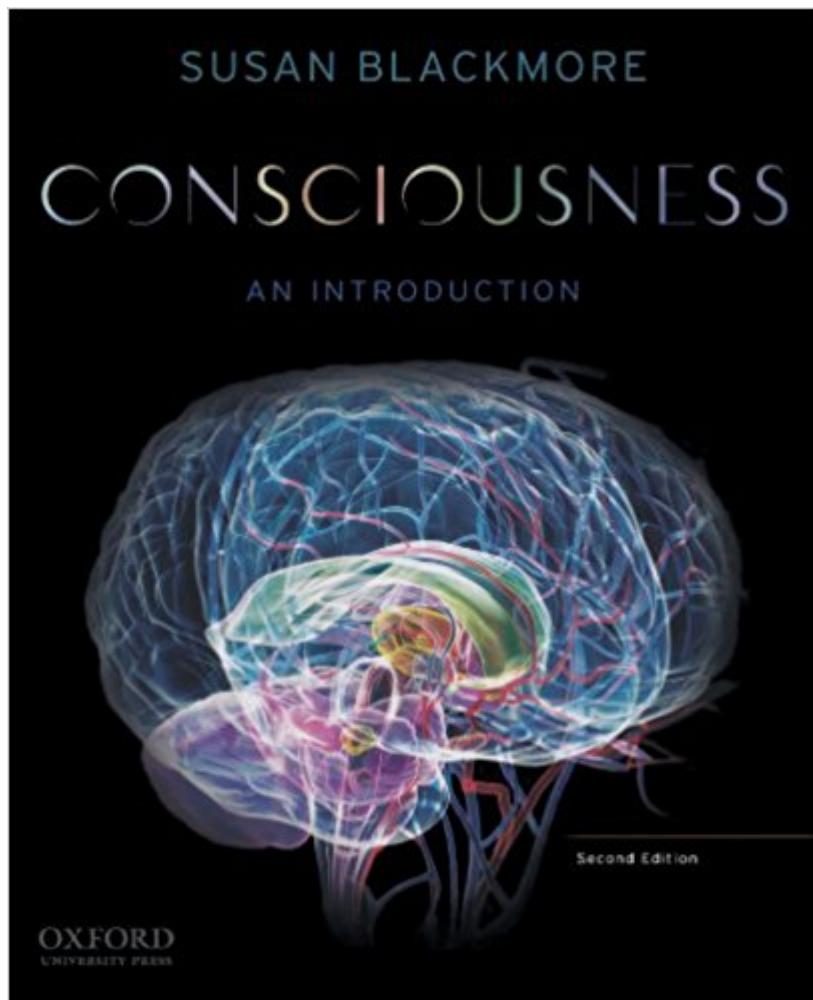


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# Consciousness: An Introduction (2nd Ed.)



## **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

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I am somewhat astonished at the negative reviews, and must strongly disagree with the rather random issues from reviewers. I have taught a course in consciousness at the undergraduate level a number of times, and the topic has been of longstanding interest. To be very clear: there is no text comparable to this. Prior to her first edition (2005), the only option was to collect primary readings

and book chapters. Blackmore does a \*great\* job pointing out the fundamental issues with consciousness without being too dry or clinical about it. She also describes well the major players in philosophy, psychology, etc. She herself is well integrated into the research and has a keen skeptical mind -- she gives fair treatment to all the right modern viewpoints. If you want a general overview of the topic of consciousness, this is an excellent text to have. The topic draws many, many different perspectives (from neuroscientists to a wide array of philosophers to psychologists to quantum physicists), and there is nothing else that takes a broad picture without pursuing a single agenda. Is there some bias? Yes, there is in a sense. But it's a bias that latches on to the general trends of serious academics today -- for example, you might say that she has a materialist bias, but that is just the way that most serious and scientifically oriented thinkers operate these days. Overall, her perspective is, I think, very objective without losing what is truly fascinating about the topic.

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.

I gave this book 5 stars because it provided me much more concepts beyond the fundamentals. The book was very easy to read in terms of being able to understand the concepts right away. Even though it is used, this book was worth looking into and useful for my class related to the topic of consciousness.

Some chapters in this book are confusing because the thought-experiments make assumptions on

what they think you will think. That's very subjective and if I don't agree with it, I might not get what they're trying to explain. But overall, this book discusses current and past "general" ideas of what consciousness is. The cover is very pretty, but the rest of the illustrations are quite bland.

This book is perhaps fit for school children, but adults who are seriously interested in consciousness studies should instead read David Chalmers's books. The reader Susan Blackmore has in mind seems to be a not necessarily terribly bright youngster. While this gives rise to an at times irritatingly condescending tone, the worst thing about the book is the way important issues are brushed aside. For instance the ability of consciousness to affect itself is seen as an argument against the theory that consciousness is an epiphenomenon, but in fact what it would take to make consciousness more than an epiphenomenon would be an ability to affect the phenomenon proper (rather than the epiphenomenon itself), and the epiphenomenon theory denies the ability of consciousness to do exactly this. Another example: Blackmore somehow has convinced herself that the origin of the universe and the nature of space and time are no longer mysteries since we now "know how to think about them". No intelligent person who follows the physico-philosophical debates on these issues can feel so confident we are on the right track in these areas. The book appears to be hurriedly written and contains quite a few examples of strange prejudice or ignorance. For instance when we hear of "the neighbor's vicious bloodhound" and note that this is not an actual, but an imagined, aggressive canine, whose mood doesn't really matter for the argument anyway we must conclude that Blackmore wanted the dog to be vicious just for effect (which is silly in itself) and chose the breed bloodhound because a breed that has "blood" in its name must be particularly ferocious. In fact bloodhounds like most other large breeds are quite gentle dogs. I am not an offended bloodhound owner or breeder, just someone who doesn't like stupid misunderstandings in books that purport to be clever. Susan Blackmore often refers to René Descartes and even offers a short "biography" according to which he is "now often called 'the father of modern philosophy'". On the other hand Immanuel Kant is only mentioned in passing on a single occasion despite the fact that Kant, now almost universally regarded as the most influential Western philosopher in the "modern" (non-classical) era, had far more important things to say about consciousness and the mind than any other philosopher before him, including Descartes. Moreover, what Kant said is still considered crucial. To quote the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: "Ideas central to his view are now central to cognitive science". It is very hard to see by what perverse "logic" Kant can be avoided in any general work on consciousness. One aspect of this book that is almost cringe worthy is the author's stated belief that her book has the potential to affect its readers in such a profound and

disturbing way they may require counseling after reading it.

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