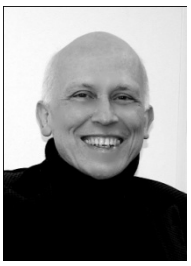
CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE BRAIN

A Series of Lectures – Free For All

Tuesday nights, 19:30 in the UCU Auditorium

February 9



Henk Barendregt (Radboud University) – *Consciousness & Meta-Consciousness*

Based on experience with insight meditation a model of consciousness will be presented. Consciousness consists of a fast running series of consciousness-moments. Each of these has an object (content) and a state (like our moods, but more detailed). The mind-states are very important: they determine whether we are creative or destructive, whether we make peace of war. The transition of the mind-states is not under our control. For example, even if we do not want to be jealous, we may still be so. Fully realizing that we are 'not the boss' is very confronting. Usually we hide this fact by feeling, thinking and acting, in short by all our good and bad habits, with the effect that we become addicted to (neuromodulators caused by) these. Nevertheless there is a way to influence the flow of mind-states via meditation. This can bring inner calm and make us ready to act in the world more fully.

February 16

Victor Lamme (University of Amsterdam) – *Towards a True Neural Stance on Consciousness*

Consciousness is traditionally defined in mental or psychological terms. In trying to find its neural basis, introspective or behavioral observations are considered the gold standard, to which neural measures should be fitted. I argue that this poses serious problems for understanding the mind–brain relationship. To solve these problems, neural and behavioral measures should be put on an equal footing. I illustrate this by an example from visual neuroscience, in which both neural and behavioral arguments converge towards a coherent scientific definition of visual consciousness. However, to accept this definition, we need to let go of our intuitive or psychological notions of conscious experience and let the neuroscience arguments have their way. Only by moving our notion of mind towards that of brain can progress be made.

February 23

Marc Slors (Radboud University) – *Consciousness and Neuroscience: The Pivotal Role of First-Person Utterances*

Although neuroimaging techniques have improved tremendously over the last decades, cognitive neuroscience still relies heavily on the use of first-person reports. Many scientists and philosophers like to believe that these utterances are descriptions of some 'inner realm' or subjective reality, displaying information that is invisible on an fMRI scan. Nevertheless, a subjective reality is very hard to square with the theory of our scientific worldview. For that reason, some philosophers have argued that the notion of consciousness as an inner realm is mistaken. First-person utterances are not reports of the data of consciousness research, they are the data. Although this view is certainly compatible with a scientific outlook on the world, it is widely felt that it throws away the baby with the bathwater and denies the reality of subjective experience. This talk will highlight this dilemma and argue that it can partly be dissolved by taking another look at the nature of first-person reports.

March 9

Eric Postma (TiCC, Tilburg University) – *The Conscious Machine*

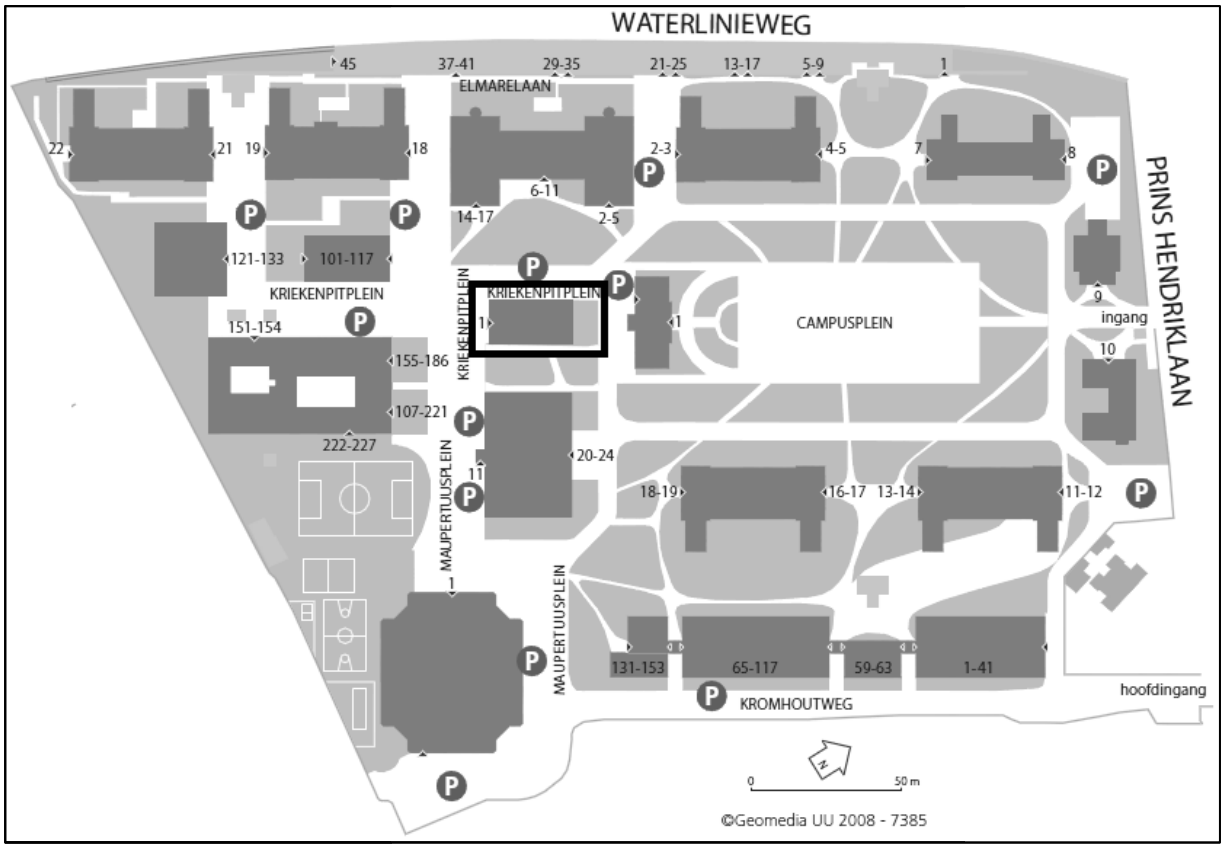
The scientific investigation of consciousness is facilitated by abandoning the first-person perspective. In this presentation, the brain is considered to be a computational machine. Adopting the metaphor of the brain as a computational machine allows for a (relatively) unbiased view of the challenges faced by the brain in effectively mapping sensory signals to (delayed) actions and behaviors. Artificial intelligence research on autonomous robots revealed many of these challenges. After a review of the challenges and their computational solutions, the emergence of consciousness is claimed to arise from evolutionary pressure. The presentation ends with a brief discussion on babies (qualia) and bathwater.

March 16

Jan Sleutels (Leiden University) – *Greek Zombies*

This talk explores the possibility that the human mind underwent substantial changes in recent history. Assuming that consciousness is a substantial trait of the mind, the paper focuses on the suggestion made by Julian Jaynes that the Mycenean Greeks had a 'bicameral' mind instead of a conscious one. The suggestion is commonly dismissed as patently absurd, for instance by critics such as Ned Block. A closer examination of the intuitions involved, considered from different theoretical angles (social constructivism, idealism, eliminativism, realism), reveals that the idea of 'Greek zombies' should be taken more seriously than is commonly assumed.

For questions, contact us at ucu.consciousness@gmail.com



Location of the UCU Auditorium