

**Special Topics Course
4414F/9760A
Cognitive Dimensions of Politicsⁱ
Department of Political Science
The University of Western Ontario
Fall 2012**

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Office Hours
Wednesdays 10am-12m

“You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.... No longer need one spend time...[enduring] the tedium of philosophers perpetually disagreeing with each other. Consciousness is now largely a scientific problem.” Francis Crick

“The brain –that particular body organ– is certainly critical to understanding how we work.... But if we want to understand how the brain contributes to consciousness, we need to look at the brain’s job in relation to the larger nonbrain body and the environment in which we find ourselves. I urge that it is a body –and world– involving conception of ourselves that the new best science as well as philosophy should lead us to endorse.” Alva Noë

“What our embodied brains are doing below the level of consciousness affects our morality and our politics –as well as just about every aspect of our social and personal lives– in ways we are all too often not aware of. Deft politicians (as well as savvy marketers) take advantage of our ignorance of our own minds to appeal to the subconscious level. Meanwhile, honest and ethical political leaders, journalists, and social activists, usually unaware of the hidden workings of the mind, fail to use what is known about the mind in the service of morality and truth.”

George Lakoff

Rationale and objectives

Over the past three decades, cognitive science –the interdisciplinary study of mind and intelligence– has radically improved our understanding of the way in which we perceive, represent and understand reality. The knowledge generated by this relatively new field of science can no longer be ignored by political science. After all, as Mark Turner points out, social science is a mental activity that deals with human actions conditioned by individual and collective mental processes.

Social science in general, and political science in particular, must critically acknowledge and confront the impact that cognitive science is having on many of the fundamental ontological and epistemological ideas and arguments that have shaped our discipline’s intellectual history. It is difficult, if not impossible, to talk today about the nature of political reality, perception, representation, concept

formation, recognition, causality, objectivity, ethnocentrism, and language, without taking into consideration what cognitive science is saying about these topics.

This course has been designed as a first point of contact between students of political science and cognitive science. Its objective is to *introduce* students to key ideas in cognitive science that have a bearing on the ways in which we study and explain political phenomena. In this sense, the course does not require any academic background on any of the disciplines that integrate cognitive science.

Content and Organization

The course will be predominantly based on academic literature and video presentations that explicitly bridge cognitive and social science and that use the language of political and social science to explore the contributions of cognitive science. It will be divided into five sections. Each of these sections will explore a set of topics in which political science and cognitive sciences converge.

- I. Introduction
- II. Political Reality and the Self (Where do you –the political scientist— end and where does the rest of the world begin?)ⁱⁱ
- III. Reason, Knowledge and Representation (Is knowledge organized ignorance in the same way as music is organized noise?)
- IV. Emotion, Empathy and Recognition (Can Mr. Spock ever become a good political scientist?)
- V. Conclusions

The first week of each of the three substantive sections (II, III and IV) of the course, will be used to examine dominant positions regarding key topics and problems in political science/social science. The second week will examine key contributions made by cognitive science regarding the same topics. The third week will be used to examine convergences, tensions and contradictions between these contributions and political science.

Prerequisites:

Political Science 2237 or 2245

Student Assessment

The overall grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Participation.....	20%
Essay.....	50%
Comparative Book Review.....	30%

Participation

Students in this course will be expected to master the assigned readings and to actively participate in the discussions that will take place every week. Moreover, students will be required to post a critical assessment of the assigned readings on the *Cognitive Dimensions of Politics Bulletin Board* that will be created for this purpose. Critical assessments must be posted each week by Monday at noon. One or two students will formally introduce the assigned readings each week having read the other students' critical comments on the bulletin board. Additional guidelines for these presentations will be provided by the instructor in class.

Essay

A research essay (15-17) double-spaced page will be due on November 28, 2012 **IN CLASS**. Guidelines for this assignment will be provided by the instructor in class.

Comparative Book Review:

Students will critically assess and compare the central premises, arguments and conclusions of the following two books:

Francis, Crick, The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul. New York: Touchstone, 1995.

Alva Noë, Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness. New York: Hill and Wang, 2010.

The book review is due on October 17, 2012. **IN CLASS**. The review should not exceed 8 double-spaced pages. Guidelines for this assignment will be provided by the instructor in class.

Note: A penalty of 5% per day (including week-ends and holidays) will be imposed on any written assignment that is not handed in on time, **IN CLASS**.

Books Recommended for Purchase:

George Lakoff, The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to your Brain and its Politics. New York: Penguin, 2009.

Alva Noë, Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness. New York: Hill and Wang, 2010.

Francis, Crick, The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul. New York: Touchstone, 1995.

Movies Recommended: Consult the *Cognitive Science Movie Index*:
<https://www.indiana.edu/~cogfilms/>

READING MATERIAL

I. INTRODUCTION

September 12: Objectives and Organization of the Course

September 19: Politics and Your Brain

Thagard, Paul, "Cognitive Science", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL =
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/cognitive-science/>.

George Lakoff, *The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to your Brain and its Politics*. New York: Penguin, 2009, 1-110.

Recommended:

Britannica, *The Britannica Guide to the Brain: A Guided Tour of the Brain –Mind, Memory, and Intelligence*. London: Robinson, 2008, 3-72.

September 26: Political Science: The Absent Brain?

Drew Westen, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*. New York: Public Affairs, 2008, 3-24.

George Lakoff, "Philosophy in the Flesh", in John Brockman, *The Mind*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2011, 11-30.

John G. Gunnell, "Are we Loosing Our Minds? Cognitive Science and the Study of Politics", *Political Theory*, 35, 2007, 704-731.

Recommended:

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenges to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books, 1999, 3-44.

George Steinmetz, "Positivism and the Others in the Social Sciences", in George Steinmetz (ed.), *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences*. Durhan/London: Duke University Press, 2005, 1-56.

II. POLITICAL REALITY AND THE SELF

October 3: Reality and the Self in Political Science

Susan Blackmore, Consciousness: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 1-81.

Diana Meyers, "Feminist Perspectives on the Self", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/feminism-self/>.

Greg Eghigian, Andreas Killen and Christine Leuenberger, "The Self as Project: Politics and the Human Sciences", Osiris, Vol. 22, 2007, 1-25.

Recommended:

Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 3-110.

October 10: Reality and the Self in Cognitive Science: You Are Your Brain/You Are More Than Your Brain

Joseph LeDoux, Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are. London: Penguin, 2002, 1-32.

Bruce Hood, The Self Illusion: How the Social Brain Creates Identity. Toronto: HarperCollins, 2012, 1-33.

Mark Rowlands, The New Science of the Mind: From Extended Mind to Embodied Phenomenology. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2010, 1-84.

Recommended:

Thomas Metzinger, The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self. New York: Basic Books, 2010.

October 17: Reality and the Self: Points of Encounter between Cognitive Science and Social Science.

Bloch, Maurice (2010) "Reconciling social science and cognitive science notions of the 'self'". LSE Research Online.
[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/29447/1/Reconciling_Social_Science_and_Cognitive_\(LSERO\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/29447/1/Reconciling_Social_Science_and_Cognitive_(LSERO).pdf)

Felipe Fernández-Armesto, So You Think You're Human? Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 9-90.

Documentary: **Transcendent Man** (2009).

From the official description of the documentary: “Trascendent Man chronicles the life and ideas of Ray Kurzweil, an inventor and futurist that presents his bold vision of the Singularity, a point in the near future when technology will be changing so rapidly, that we will have to enhance ourselves with artificial intelligence to keep up. Ray predicts this will be the dawning of a new civilization in which we will no longer be dependent on our physical bodies, we will be trillions of times more intelligent and there will be no clear distinction between human and machine, real reality and virtual reality” <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1117394/>.

Recommended:

Raymond Tallis, *Aping Mankind: Neuromania, Darwinists and the Misrepresentation of Humanity*. Durham: Acumen, 2011.

III. REASON, KNOWLEDGE AND REPRESENTATION

October 24: Epistemological Foundations of Political Science

Steup, Matthias, "Epistemology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/epistemology/>.

Glanzberg, Michael, "Truth", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/truth/>.

David Marsh and Paul Furlong, “A Skin not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science”, in Gerry Stoker, *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 17-44.

Phyllis Rooney, “The Marginalization of Feminist Epistemology and What That Reveals About Epistemology ‘Proper’”, in Heidi E. Grasswick, ed., *Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science: Power in Knowledge*. New York: Springer, 2011, 3-24.

Recommended:

Sophia Mihic, Stephen G. Engelmann, and Elizabeth Rose Wingrove, “Making Sense In and Of Political Science” in George Steinmetz, ed., *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2005, 470-495.

October 31: Political Cognition: Contributions from Cognitive Science

Jean-Pierre Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth: Neuroscience and Human Knowledge*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009, 1-70.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, 3-51.

Matthew D. Lieberman and Darren Schreiber, "Is Political Cognition Like a Bicycle? How Cognitive Neuroscience Can Inform Research on Political Thinking", Political Psychology, Vol. 24, No. 4, 2003, 681-704.

Recommended:

Emily Hauptmann, "Political Science/Political Theory: Defining 'Theory' in Postwar Political Science", in George Steinmetz (ed.), The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2005, 207-232.

November 7: The Nature of Knowledge: Points of Encounter Between Cognitive Science and Social Science.

Case Study: The Liberation of Dissonance in Music and the Human Sciences.

Daniel Levitin and David Byrne, "On Music", in Adam Bly, ed., Science is Culture. New York: Harper Perennial, 2010, 147-161.

Jonah Lehrer, "Igor Stravinsky: The Source of Music", in Proust was a Neuroscientist. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007, 120-143

Peter Singer, Animal Liberation. New York: Ecco, 2002, 1-24.

Joan Dunayer, Animal Equality: Language and Liberation. Derwood, Maryland: Rice Pub, 2001, 5-23.

In-class movie: Relevant parts of *Coco Chanel & Igor Stravinsky* (2009). Director: Jan Kounen. From the official description of the movie: "Paris 1913. Igor Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring is about to be performed. The revolutionary dissonances of Igor's work parallel Coco's radical ideas. She wants to democratize women's fashion; he wants to redefine musical taste. Coco attends the scandalous first performance of The Rite in a chic white dress. The music and ballet are criticized as too modern, too foreign" <http://www.imdb.com/find>

IV. EMOTION, EMPATHY AND RECOGNITION

November 14: Dealing with the Other: Justice and Morality in Political Science

Jack Barbalet, "Emotion in Social Life and Social Theory", in Monica Greco and Paul Stenner, eds., Emotions: A Social Science Reader. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Julie Connolly, Michael Leach and Lucas Walsh, eds., Recognition in Politics: Theory, Policy and Practice. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, 1-15

Matthew Ericson, "Seeing Justice, Recognition and Identity in Abu Ghraib", in Julie Connolly, Michael Leach and Lucas Walsh, eds. Recognition in Politics: Theory, Policy and Practice. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, 136-154.

Recommended:

Tom Campbell, Justice. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Robert W. Glover, "Of Virtues and Values: Sympathy, Empathy, and Agonistic Respect in Recent Democratic Theory". Paper delivered at the 2011 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.

http://umaine.academia.edu/RobertGlover/Papers/745611/Of_Virtues_and_Values_Sympathy_Empathy_and_Agonistic_Respect_in_Recent_Democratic_Theor

November 21: Justice, Morality and the Emotional Brain

Patricia S. Churchland, Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011, 1-26.

Joseph Ledoux, The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life. New York: Touchstone, 2000, 11-72.

Peter Singer, The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution and Moral Progress. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, 3-53.

Recommended:

John O'Manique, The Origins of Justice: The Evolution of Morality, Human Rights and Law. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

November 28: Emotion, Empathy and Recognition: Points of Encounter Between Cognitive Science and Social Science

Case Study: The Contribution of Visual Perspective to Our Intuitive Understanding of the Holocaust.

V. S. Ramachandran, "The Neurology of Self-Awareness", in John Brockman, The Mind. New York: Harper Perennial, 2011, 147-152.

Christian Keysers, The Emphatic Brain. Creatspace, 2011, 7-52.

Documentary: *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust* (2004). From the official description of the documentary: "For over a half a century Hollywood films have dealt with Nazism and the Holocaust in complex and often contradictory ways. Marked by outrage and indifference, compassion and ignorance, the need to

understand and the desire to forget. And yet while this most horrific chapter in modern world history happened far from America's shores, it has been American movies, perhaps more than any other medium, that have shaped how we understand and remember these events" <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0379158/>

Recommended:

V. S. Ramachandran, Phantoms in the Brain: Probing the Mysteries of the Human Mind. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1998.

December 5: Conclusions

Rose McDermott, "The Feeling of Rationality: The Meaning of Neuroscientific Advances for Political Science", Perspectives on Politics, December 2004, Vol. 2, No. 4, 691-706.

Edward O. Wilson, The Social Conquest of Earth. New York: Liveright Publishing, 2012, 191-300.

ⁱ The title of this course is a variation of the title of Mark Turner's Cognitive Dimensions of Social Science. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

ⁱⁱ This question is a variation of the question raised by Alva Noë in Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness. New York: Hill and Wang, 2009, 67.

(Graduate) Statement of Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf