

**Special Topics Course  
4205F/9760A  
Cognitive Dimensions of Politics  
Department of Political Science  
The University of Western Ontario  
Fall 2013**

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**Office Hours**  
**Thursdays 1pm-3pm**

“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

**Important Notice Re: Prerequisites/Antirequisites**

Please Note: You are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites, and that you have not taken an antirequisite course. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as a basis for an appeal. If you are found to be ineligible for a course, you may be removed from it at any time and you will receive no adjustment to your fees. This decision cannot be appealed. If you find that you do not have the course prerequisites, it is in your best interest to drop the course well before the end of the add/drop period. Your prompt attention to this matter will not only help protect your academic record, but will ensure that spaces become available for students who require the course in question for graduation.  
Office of the Dean, Faculty of Social Science

### 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 and debates 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 interconnected sections:

- I. Introduction: Brain/Mind (two weeks).
- II. The debate about *mental representations* and its implications for Political Science (three weeks).
- III. The debate about the *extended mind* and its implications for the study and understanding of social and political order/social and political institutions (three weeks).
- IV. The debate about *self/other consciousness* and its implications for the study and understanding of morality and justice (three weeks).
- V. Conclusions: Political Science and Cognitive Sciences (one week).

### Prerequisites:

Political Science 2237 or 2245

## Student Assessment

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

Participation.....	20%
Essay.....	50%
Book Review/s.....	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 27, 2013 **IN CLASS**. Guidelines for this assignment will be provided by the instructor in class.

## Book Review/s:

Undergraduate students will review one of the following books:

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.

Neil Shubin, Your Inner Fish: A Journey into the 3.5 Billion-Year History of the Human Body. New York: Vintage Books, 2009.

The book review (undergraduates) is due on October 16, 2013, **IN CLASS**.

Graduate students will review two of the following books:

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.

Neil Shubin, Your Inner Fish: A Journey into the 3.5 Billion-Year History of the Human Body. New York: Vintage Books, 2009.

Andy Clark, Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action and Cognitive Extension. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

The first book review (graduates) is due on October 16, 2013, **IN CLASS**.

The second book review (graduates) is due on December 4, 2013, **IN CLASS**.

The reviews (undergraduates and graduates) 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:

Bruce E. Wexler, Brain and Culture: Neurobiology, Ideology and Social Change. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006.

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.

Neil Shubin, Your Inner Fish: A Journey into the 3.5 Billion-Year History of the Human Body. New York: Vintage Books, 2009.

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

#### **Support Services**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

## **READING MATERIAL**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

September 11: Introduction to the course: Brain/Mind

September 18: Political Science: The absent brain?

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

Mauricio Meloni, "On the Growing Intellectual Authority of Neuroscience for Political and Moral Theory: Sketch for a Genealogy," in Frank Vander Valk, ed., Essays on Neuroscience and Political Theory: Thinking the Body Politic. London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 25-49.

Leslie Paul Thiele, "Brain Sculpting as Moral Practice: a Neuro-Aristotelian Approach," in Essays on Neuroscience and Political Theory: Thinking the Body Politic. London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 119-139.

### **II. The debate about mental representations and its implications for Political Science**

September 25: The Embodied Brain/Mind

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

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

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

October 2: Brain/Mind: Evolutionary Arguments

Edward O. Wilson and Daniel C. Dennett, "Evolutionary Philosophy," in Adam Bly, ed., Science is Culture. New York: Harper Perennial, 2010, 1-22.

Daniel Lord Smail, On Deep History and the Brain. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, 12-156.

October 9: Mental Representations

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

Daniel Kolak et al., Cognitive Science: An Introduction to Mind and Brain. New York: Routledge, 2006, 5-53.

David Pitt, "Mental Representation", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/mental-representation/>.

Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, "The Ontology of Concepts –Abstract Objects or Mental Representations? In Noûs, Volume 41, Issue 4, December 2007, 561–593.

October 16: Presentation of Book Reviews

### **III. The debate about the *extended mind* and its implications for the study and understanding of social and political order/social and political institutions**

October 23: Brain/Mind and Culture

Bruce E. Wexler, Brain and Culture: Neurobiology, Ideology, and Social Change. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006, 1-138.

Daniel C. Dennett, "The Evolution of Culture," in John Brockman, ed., Culture. New York: Harper Perennial, 2011, 1-26.

Richard E. Nisbett, The Geography of Thought. New York: Free Press, 2003, 1-77.

October 30: The Scaffolded Mind: Institutions as Cognitive Tools

Kim Sterelny, "Minds: Extended or Scaffolded?" Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences, Volume 9, Issue 4, December 2010, 465-481.

Lawrence E. Williams et al., "The Scaffolded Mind: Higher Mental Processes are Grounded in Early Experience of the Physical World," European Journal of Social Psychology, No. 39, 2009, 1257–1267.

Bruce E. Wexler, Brain and Culture: Neurobiological, Ideology, and Social Change. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 142-253.

Andy Clark, Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action and Cognitive Extension. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 85-168.

Jerry Fodor, Where is my mind? Review of Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action and Cognitive Extension by Andy Clark London Review of Books, Vol. 31 No. 312, February 2009, 13-15.

Andy Clark, "Reply to Jerry Fodor," The London Review of Books, Vol. 31 No. 6, 26 March 2009.

November 6: Global cultures? Global Mind/Brains?

Paul Thagard, "Mapping Minds across Cultures," in Ron Sun, ed., Grounding Social Sciences in Cognitive Sciences. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012, 35-62.

Bradd Shore, "Egocentric and Allocentric Perspective in Cultural Models," in Ron Sun, ed., Grounding Social Sciences in Cognitive Sciences. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012, 89-123.

Daniel Haun, "How Odd I Am!" in Max Brockman, Future Science: Essays from the Cutting Edge. New York: Vintage, 2011, 228-235.

Dominique Moïsi, The Geopolitics of Emotion. New York: Anchor Books, 2009, 1-120.

**IV. The debate about self/other consciousness and its implications for the study and understanding of morality and justice.**

November 13: Self/Other Consciousness

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.

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.

November 20: Emotions, Empathy and Recognition

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

Marlene K. Sokolon, "Does Deliberation Make You Angry? Neuroscience and Theories of Deliberative Democracy," in Frank Vander Valk, ed., Essays on Neuroscience and Political Theory: Thinking the Body Politic. London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 2-1-221.

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

Jordan Zlatev, The Shared Mind: Perspectives on Intersubjectivity. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2008, 17-66.

November 27: Justice, Morality and the Emotional Brain

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

Kristen Renwick Monroe, "Cognition and Moral Choice," in Ron Sun, ed., Grounding Social Sciences in Cognitive Sciences. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012, 183-205.

Joshua W Buckholtz & René Marois, "The roots of modern justice: cognitive and neural foundations of social norms and their enforcement," Nature Neuroscience 15, 2012, 655-661.

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

## **V. Conclusions**

December 4: The Social and Neurobiological Construction of Reality

Jorge Luis Borges, "The Circular Ruins," in Douglas R. Hofstadter and Daniel C. Dennett, eds., The Mind's I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul. New York: Basic Books, 1981, 344-347.

Jan Slaby, Philipp Haueis, and Suparna Choudhury, "Neuroscience as Applied Hermeneutics: Towards a Critical Neuroscience of Political Theory," in Frank Vander Valk, ed., Essays on Neuroscience and Political Theory: Thinking the Body Politic. London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 50-73.

**(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](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)