

4205F/9760A
Cognitive Dimensions of Politics
Department of Political Science
The University of Western Ontario
Fall 2015

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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

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

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 arguments and positions 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. In this sense, the course does not require any academic background on any of the disciplines that integrate cognitive science. It will be predominantly based on academic literature that explicitly bridge cognitive and social sciences.

Course Learning Objective

The objective of this course 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.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, successful students will be able to explain and assess:

- The debate about *mental representations* and its implications for the study of politics.
- The debate about the *extended mind* and its implications for the study and understanding of social and political institutions.
- The debate about *self/other consciousness* and its implications for the study and understanding of empathy, recognition and morality.

Content and Organization

The course will be divided into five interconnected sections:

- I. Introduction: Nature, nurture, and the brain.
- II. The debate about *mental representations* and its implications for the study of politics.
- III. The debate about the *extended mind* and its implications for the study and understanding of social and political institutions.
- IV. The debate about *self/other consciousness* and its implications for the study and understanding of empathy and recognition.
- V. Conclusions: Political Science and Cognitive Sciences.

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, they will be required to post a critical assessment of the assigned readings on the *Cognitive Dimensions of Politics Bulletin Board* that has been 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.

To visit the *Cognitive Dimensions of Politics Bulletin Board* on the web, go to:

<https://ca.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/cognitivedimensions/info>

Essay

A research essay (15-17) double-spaced page will be due on December 2, 2015 IN CLASS. Guidelines for this assignment will be provided by the instructor in class.

Book Review:

Minimum length: 4 double-spaced pages. Maximum length: 6 double-spaced pages.

Students will review one of the following books:

Joshua Greene, Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them. New York: Penguin, 2013.

Joseph E LeDoux, Anxious: The Modern Mind in the Age of Anxiety. New York: Viking, 2015.

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

Mark Pagel, Wired for Culture: Origins of the Human Social Mind. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012.

The book review is due on November 11, 2015, **IN CLASS**.

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:

Evelyn Fox Keller, The Mirage of a Space Between Nature and Nurture. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010

Keith Frankish, ed., The Cambridge Handbook of Cognitive Science. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Mark Johnson, Morality for Humans: Ethical Understanding from the Perspective of Cognitive Science. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014.

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

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.

OUTLINE AND READING MATERIAL

I. Introduction: Nature, Nurture, and the Brain

September 16: Introduction to the course: Political Science: The Case of the Absent Brain.

September 23: Nature, Nurture, and the Brain (I)

Evelyn Fox Keller, The Mirage of a Space Between Nature and Nurture. Durham: Duke University Press. 2010.

Recommended:

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

September 30: Nature, Nurture, and the Brain (II)

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

J. Andrew Ross, "The Self: From Soul to Brain." Journal of Consciousness Studies, 10, No. 2, 2003, pp. 67-85

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

Recommended:

Leonard Mlodinow, The Upright Thinkers: The Human Journey from Living in Trees to Understanding the Cosmos. New York: Pantheon Books, 2015.

II. Nurture/Nature: The Debate About Mental Representations and its Implications for Political Science

October 7: Mental Representations: Basic Definitions/Interpretations

Barbara Von Eckardt, "The Representational Theory of Mind," in Keith Frankish, ed., The Cambridge Handbook of Cognitive Science. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 29-49.

Paul Thagard, "Cognitive Structures," in Keith Frankish, ed., The Cambridge Handbook of Cognitive Science. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 50-72.

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/>.

Recommended:

Hugh Clapin, ed., Philosophy of Mental Representation. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

October 14: Mental Representations: Models, Schemas and Concepts

Gregory L. Murphy and Aaron B. Hoffman, "Concepts," in Keith Frankish, ed., The Cambridge Handbook of Cognitive Science. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 151-170.

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

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors we Live By. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, 3-32.

Susan Blackmore, "The Power of Memes," Scientific American, October, 2000, 64-73.

Recommended:

Susan Carey, The Origins of Concepts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

October 21: Emotions and Mental Representations

Antonio Damasio, Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain. New York: Harcourt Inc., 2003, 27-80.

Jesse Prinz, "Emotion," in Keith Frankish, ed., The Cambridge Handbook of Cognitive Science. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 193-211.

Suzanne Oosterwijk and Lisa Feldman Barrett, "Embodiment in the Construction of Emotion Experience and Emotion Understanding," in

Lawrenc Shapiro, ed., The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition. New York: Routledge, 2014, 250-260.

L. M. Hartling, E. Lindner, U. Spalthoff and M. Britton, "Humiliation: A Nuclear Bomb of Emotions?" Psicología Política, Nº 46, 2013, 55-76.

Recommended:

Joseph E LeDoux, Anxious: The Modern Mind in the Age of Anxiety. New York: Viking, 2015

III. Nurture/Nature: The Debate About the Extended Mind and its Implications for the Study and Understanding of Culture and Institutions

October 28: The Extended Mind

Andy Clark, "Embodied, embedded, and extended cognition," in Keith Frankish, ed., The Cambridge Handbook of Cognitive Science. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 275-291.

Mark Rowlands, The New Science of the Mind: From Extended Mind to Embodied Phenomenology. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2010, 1-54.

Recommended:

Alva Noe, Varieties of Presence. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012.

November 4: Culture, Institutions and the Brain

Bruce E. Wexler, Brain and Culture: Neurobiology, Ideology, and Social Change. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006, 39-137.

Tamer Soliman and Arthur M. Glenberg, "The Embodiment of Culture," in Lawrence Shapiro, The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition. New York: Routledge, 2014, 207-219.

Jesse Prinze, "Culture and Cognitive Science", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/culture-cogsci/>.

Recommended:

Mark Pagel, Wired for Culture: Origins of the Human Social Mind. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012.

November 11: The Scaffolded Mind

Bruce E. Wexler, Brain and Culture: Neurobiology, Ideology, and Social Change. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006, 141-253.

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.

Paul R. Smart, "Embodiment, cognition and the World Wide Web" in Lawrence Shapiro, The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition. New York: Routledge, 2014, 326-344.

Recommended:

L. Caporael, J. Griesemer and W. Wimsatt, eds., Developing Scaffolding in Evolution, Cognition, and Culture. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014

IV. The Debate About Self/Other Consciousness and its Implications for the Study and Understanding of Morality and Justice.

November 18: Self/Other Consciousness

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

William G. Lycan, "Consciousness", in Lawrence Shapiro, The Routledge Handbook of Embodied Cognition. New York: Routledge, 2014, 212-234.

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, 1-24.

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/>.

Recommended:

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

November 25: Morality

Mark Johnson, Morality for Humans: Ethical Understanding from the Perspective of Cognitive Science. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014, 1-111.

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.

Recommended:

Joshua Greene, Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them. New York: Penguin, 2013.

December 2: Empathy, Recognition, and Justice

Mark Johnson, Morality for Humans: Ethical Understanding from the Perspective of Cognitive Science. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014, 112-221.

V. S. Ramachandran, The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest for What Makes Us Human. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012, 3-40.

Gregory Hickok, The Myth of Mirror Neurons: The Real Neuroscience of Communication and Cognition. New York: W.W. Horton, 2014, 1-76.

N. Ann Rider, "The Perils of Empathy: Holocaust Narratives, Cognitive Studies and the Politics of Sentiment," Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2013, 43-72.

Recommended:

Peter Corning, The Fair Society and the Pursuit of Social Justice. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.

V. Conclusions

December 9: The Poetry of Cognitive Science

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.

Rodrigo Quian Quiroga, Borges and Memory: Encounters with the Human Brain. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012, 1-36.