Psychology 8610
The Self and Free Will: Conscious and Unconscious Influences on Cognition and Behavior
Dr. Andy Karpinski
Spring 2009

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Office Hours MW 10:30-12:00 and by appointment

I am happy to meet with you to go over lecture material, journal readings, assignments, or to address any questions you have about the class – just stop by during office hours or make an appointment.

Class Meets: Thursday, 10:30 am -1:30 pm, 642 Weiss Hall

Prerequisites: A reasonable understanding of statistics and research design. You must also be inquisitive and have an interest in learning about the self and free will.

Required Book:

Course Website: Blackboard
With the exception of the required book, all required journal and book readings will be available from the course website on Blackboard.

Why are we here???
In this course we will work toward an understanding of the self and free will. We will start by considering the nature of the unconscious mind and will examine evidence for the existence of unconscious processes in memory, problem solving, behavior in social settings, and our attitudes, beliefs, and opinions. We will then study the nature of consciousness from psychological and philosophical perspectives, with a focus on trying to answer the questions of: what is consciousness, what does consciousness do, and why does consciousness exist. These topics will naturally lead us to question the nature of the self and the role of free will in behavior and cognition. We will spend the final month of the course grappling with the issue of free will.

This will be a challenging course. For many of the issues we will discuss, there is no scientific consensus regarding the right answer or the most correct theory. Be prepared to think critically and to tolerate perplexity. Be prepared to challenge your notions of how the mind works, of consciousness, of the self, and of free will.

For you to get the most out of this class, it is essential that you:

1) Read. There is a moderate reading load for this class. I expect you to have critically read all of the readings before you come to class. Put your thinking caps on!
2) Think. We will be reading about and discussing some complex ideas that have perplexed philosophers and psychologists for centuries.
3) Write. You will have to write and post weekly comments on the readings and write two brief papers.
4) Participate. I will have a small amount of prepared material every class, but the purpose of this material and of the readings is to stimulate discussion. I expect you to be an active participant in the class discussions, both in class and on Blackboard.
Grading:

- Weekly Comments 25%
- Discussion 25%
- Research Paper 25%
- Book Commentary/Review 25%

Weekly Comments/Thoughts

In order to facilitate a lively discussion, I would like you to post on Blackboard two comments on each required reading. For short articles (less than 3 pages), only one comment is required. Comments are to be posted on Blackboard by 6:00 PM on Tuesday. Each of your comments should be posted under the thread for the appropriate article and each of your comments should be posted separately. (That is, you should have two separate posts for each article you read). Comments should not be summaries of the reading, but springboards for discussion. You can comment on common themes, contradictions, important factors that were omitted by the authors, areas in which the authors appeared to be confused, how this reading relates to other readings or to other psychological theories/construct, research ideas, or other ideas that could lead to a productive discussion. I will grade these comments on a 3-point scale, based on how much thought seems to have gone into them.

Discussion

I expect you to be an active participant in the class. You can contribute to the discussion in two ways. First, you can comment on other students’ comments posted on Blackboard (and you can respond when people comment on your comments). Second, you can contribute to the discussion in class. I expect you to contribute to the discussion in both ways, although you may contribute more in one way than the other.

Research Paper

For this paper, I would like to tell me how the information we covered about unconscious/automatic processing, consciousness, and/or the self has changed (or how it could change) the way you think about your area of research. You should spend no more than a paragraph concisely describing your research interest(s). In the remainder of the paper, you should describe connections you have made between your research and the content of the course. This paper need not be in the form of a research proposal (although it may be); you may also describe how the material could inform the theory, methods, or application of your area of research. Your paper should be no longer than four pages (double-spaced; 12-point font) and is due in class on April 16.

Book Review/Commentary

I would like you to write a review/commentary of Wegner’s Illusion of Conscious Will. In this paper, you should critically evaluate Wegner’s arguments—not summarizing the entire book, but drawing upon his arguments (and other research/ideas presented in class) as necessary. You should also state your views on free will and reconcile any discrepancies between your views and those of Wegner (and others, as necessary). It is not necessary to conduct any outside research for this paper. Your paper should be no longer than four pages (double-spaced; 12-point font) and is due in class on May 7.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's labor, another person's ideas, another person's words, or another person's assistance. Normally, all work done for courses—papers, examinations, homework exercises, laboratory reports, oral presentations—is expected to be the individual effort of the student presenting the work. Any assistance must be reported to the instructor. If the work has entailed consulting other resources—journals, books, or other media—these resources must be cited in a manner appropriate to the course. Everything used from other sources—suggestions for organization of ideas, ideas themselves, or actual language—must be cited. Failure to cite borrowed material constitutes plagiarism. Undocumented use of materials from the World Wide Web is plagiarism. If you are caught plagiarizing or cheating, you will fail the assignment, and, depending upon the severity of the violation, you may fail the class. I will not hesitate to bring the matter to the college.

Disabilities Statement: Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss the specific situation, no later than February 8. Contact Disability Resources and Services at 215-204-1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.
Tentative Class Schedule

Week 1: Jan 22
The Cognitive Unconscious I: The Automaticity of Social Life
To be read by everyone

Read one of the following:

Week 2: Jan 29
The Cognitive Unconscious II: Implicit Perception, Learning, & Memory
To be read by all

Read one of the following

Feb 5
No Class – Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference

Feb 12
No Class – Illness
Week 3: Feb 19
The Cognitive Unconscious III: Unconscious Emotions and Evaluations
https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/

Week 4: Feb 26
The Cognitive Unconscious IV: Decision Making and Creativity

Week 5: March 5
Consciousness I: Philosophical Considerations

March 12
No Class: Spring Break

Week 6: March 19
Consciousness II: The Mind and the World

Optional
Week 7: March 26
Consciousness III/The Self I: Knowing Ourselves

Week 8: April 2
The Self II: How Many Selves?

April 9
*No Class: Single Category IAT Conference*

Week 9: April 16
The Self III: The Implicit Self

Optional:
Week 10: April 23
Free Will: The Illusion
   Libet, B. (1999). Do we have free will? Journal of Consciousness Studies, 6, 47-57.

Week 11: April 29
Interpreting Actions and Intentions

Week 12: May 7
Action Projection, & Virtual Agency

Week 13: May 12
Free Will & Morality

Optional: