

PHIL 209N – *Know Thyself: Wisdom Through Cognitive Science*

1120 Susquehanna Hall, Mon & Wed 1.00-1.50 + Friday discussion sections

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Course Description

How do we improve our decision making? Cognitive science demonstrates that self-knowledge isn't as easy as we think, and that there are numerous biases and fallacies that impact our decision-making in ways that are hard for us to be aware of. In this course you will learn what some of these are and how they have been discovered, and you will explore potential strategies for avoiding these fallacies and for making wiser choices.

Expectations of Students

The plenary Monday/Wednesday sessions will involve a mixture (in varying proportions) of lecturing and open discussion; the Friday sections will involve a mixture of discussion and group work. Students are expected to attend regularly, and to be actively involved throughout. All laptops, cellphones, and other electronic devices will need to be turned off during all classes. This is both to facilitate active learning and as a courtesy to other learners.

Course Texts

All required readings for the course are available on the course ELMS Blackboard site. These will need to be studied in advance of the relevant Friday section, following the schedule outlined below. These readings should be printed and brought with you to your Friday section, since laptops will not be permitted. (Note that the cost of printing is the only cost associated with the course.)

Assessment and Grading Policy

Assessment for the course will be by one class test (20%), one group debate (20%), one group writing project (30%), and a final exam (30%). Where possible, grading will be conducted anonymously. For group activities, members of each group will be asked to evaluate the

contributions of other group members, impacting their grade. Dates/deadlines and details are as follows:

Monday, October 3 — Class test. You will be asked to answer a number of questions to gauge your understanding of the foundational material covered in the first eight lectures, and to encourage you to be reflective about its significance. Answers should be written in clear plain English, and will be evaluated for understanding displayed and for thoughtfulness and creativity shown. Grading will be anonymous.

Friday, October 28 — Group debates. Groups will be assigned to speak for or against one of the three proposals listed below. In each case additional readings may need to be researched (e.g. using Google Scholar). Group performance will be evaluated for understanding of relevant findings in cognitive science, for the cogency of the case presented, and for creativity. Group members will be asked to evaluate the contributions of other members of the group along these dimensions (*not* the fluency or extent of verbal contributions to the debate itself), and grades will be adjusted accordingly.

Topic (1): Proposal to be defended / attacked: Candidates for employment should not be asked for personal interviews because of the affective influence that these exert on hiring decisions.

Topic (2): Proposal to be defended / attacked: Because of temporal discounting and the difficulty of affective forecasting, so-called “living wills” should not be regarded as a valid basis for informed consent.

Topic (3): Proposal to be defended / attacked: Health insurers should support homeopathy and faith-based medicine because of their positive [placebo] effects.

Friday, December 9 — Group projects. These need to be submitted at the beginning of class. Late submissions will be penalized by one grade increment (e.g. B+ to B) for each day or portion of a day after this. Projects will be evaluated for quality of organization, presentation, and writing; for understanding of relevant findings in cognitive science; for the cogency of the case presented; and for creativity displayed. Group members will be asked to evaluate the contributions of other members of the group, and individual grades will be adjusted accordingly.

In each case projects should take the form of an advisory document aimed at some suitable authority (e.g. a federal agency or an employer) urging the adoption of a policy designed to mitigate the effects of a documented human weakness. Additional supporting readings may need to be researched (e.g. using Google Scholar). Projects should be between 1,500 and 3,000 words long.

Topic (1): a policy for nudging people in the direction of better habits of self-control or long-term planning (e.g. relating to healthy eating, or to long-term saving).

Topic (2): a policy for mitigating the unconscious effects of stereotypes, whether on others or on oneself (e.g. relating to hiring decisions, or to exam performance).

Topic (3): a policy for mitigating the effects of the constructive nature of memory (e.g. concerning eyewitness or other memory-based testimony in court).

Friday, December 16, 1.30-3.30 — Final exam. You will be required to write a number of short essays on topics covered in the course, with special emphasis on topics covered after mid-November. Essays will be graded anonymously, and will be evaluated for the same qualities as the projects. The exam paper will be released in the final class, Monday December 12. You should therefore prepare your answers in advance. However, you will not be permitted to bring papers or other written materials into the exam.

Once grades for all the components of the course have been assigned, the instructor reserves the right to make adjustments before grades are submitted to UMEG. This may be to correct for a skew in the overall distribution of grades, for example, or to credit someone who has shown dramatic improvement through the course.

Schedule of Reading

In each case reading should be completed in advance of the dates given below. Come to class prepared to discuss and ask questions, bringing printed copies with you. All readings are accessible on the course ELMS site.

Sept. 2 — no reading; but students should attend class for some initial discussion and for working groups to be assigned.

Sept. 9 — (1) Engelbert, M. and Carruthers, P. (2010). Introspection. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 1, 245-253.

Sept. 16 — (1) Baillargeon et al. (2010). False-belief understanding in infants. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 14 (3), 110-118.

(2) Gazzaniga, M. (2000). Cerebral specialization and inter-hemispheric communication. *Brain*, 123, 1293-1326. [especially pp. 1315-1319]

Sept. 23 — (1) Winkielman et al. (2005). Unconscious affective reactions to masked happy versus angry faces influence consumption behavior and judgments of value. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31, 121-135.

(2) Wheatley, T. and Haidt, J. (2005). Hypnotic disgust makes moral judgments more severe. *Psychological Science*, 16, 780-784.

Sept. 30 — (1) Johansson et al. (2005). Failure to detect mismatches between intention and outcome in a simple decision task. *Science*, 310, 116-119.

(2) Wilson et al. (1993). Introspecting about reasons can reduce post-choice satisfaction. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 19, 331-339.

Oct. 7 — (1) Wilson, T. and Gilbert, D. (2005). Affective forecasting: knowing what to

- want. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14, 131-134.
- Oct. 14 — (1) Bonanno et al. (2005). Resilience to loss in bereaved spouses, bereaved parents, and bereaved gay men. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 827-843.
- (2) Peters, J., and Buchel, C. (2011). The neural mechanisms of inter-temporal decision-making: understanding variability. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 15, 227-239.
- Oct. 21 — (1) Plassmann et al. (2008). Marketing actions can modulate neural representations of experienced pleasantness. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 105, 1050-1054.
- (2) Wager, T. (2005). The neural bases of placebo effects in pain. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14, 175-179.
- Oct. 28 — note: since this date will be devoted to group debates on earlier topics, the readings for this week should be studied in advance of the plenary Mon/Wed sessions. These will be more interactive than usual, with more opportunities for questions and discussion.
- (1) Masicampo, E. and Baumeister, R. (2008). Toward a physiology of dual-process reasoning and judgment. *Psychological Science*, 19, 255-260.
- (2) Kurzban, R. (2010). Does the brain consume additional glucose during self-control tasks? *Evolutionary Psychology*, 8, 244-259.
- Nov. 4 — note: prior to this date all students should take the implicit attitudes test (pertaining to race) at: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/>
- (1) Bertrand et al. (2005). Implicit discrimination. *American Economic Review*, 58, 494-514.
- (2) Leslie, S-J. (2011). The original sin of cognition: fear, prejudice, and generalization. *Journal of Philosophy*.
- Nov. 11 — (1) Bruck, M. and Ceci, S. (1999). The suggestibility of children's memory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50, 419-439.
- (2) Wells et al. (2000). From the lab to the police station: A successful application of eyewitness research. *American Psychologist*, 55, 581-598.
- Nov. 18 — (1) Scher, S. and Cooper, J. (1989). Motivational basis of dissonance: The singular role of behavioral consequences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56, 899-906.
- (2) Simon et al. (1995). Trivialization: The forgotten mode of dissonance reduction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68, 247-260.
- Nov. 25 — Thanksgiving break. Note: the class will meet on Monday 21st but not Wednesday 23rd of this week. The reading for this week should be studied in advance of the plenary Monday session. This will be more interactive than usual.
- (1) Brinol, P. and Petty, R. (2003). Overt head movements and persuasion: A self-

validation analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 1123-1139.

Dec. 2 — (1) Kahneman, D. (2002). Maps of bounded rationality: A perspective on intuitive judgment and choice. *Nobel Prize Lecture*.

(2) Samuels, R. and Stich, S. (2004). Rationality and psychology. In A. Mele and P. Rawling (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Rationality*, Oxford University Press.

Dec. 9 — (1) Gigerenzer, G. and Gaissmaier, W. (2011). Heuristic decision making. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 62, 451-482.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability of any sort that requires an accommodation to be made in the arrangements for the course, you should inform the TA at the start of the course, who will then consult with the University's Disability Support Service.

Religious Observances and other Absences

It is the student's responsibility to inform their TA and/or Instructor of any intended absences for religious observances *in advance*.

Students who need to be absent for personal reasons should seek permission *in advance* from the TA or Instructor. Absence due to illness will need to be supported by medical documentation. Students who have an excused reason for being unable to contribute to group work will be given another assignment.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to comply with the University's code of academic integrity. Academic dishonesty of any kind will automatically result in a grade of XF for the course.

The following statement is from the University: The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit:

<http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html>.