

Political Science 302

Free Will, Nature, and Nurture in Politics and Society

University of Washington
Spring 2022

Professor Mark Alan Smith
office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 5:00-6:00, by Zoom at
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Overview of Class:

Do we choose our political values and opinions, or do they result from forces such as genes, socialization, the mass media, and the persuasive power of political elites? Why and when do people commit horrific acts of violence? Why do religious beliefs and practices vary so much from person to person? Where do sexual orientation and gender identity come from? How much control do we have over our personal achievements and the course of our lives?

Broadly speaking, answers to questions such as these invoke one or more of three responses: free will, meaning that we freely choose our actions, opinions, and worldviews; nature, meaning that we follow the paths set by our shared and varying human natures; and nurture, meaning that we are the products of particular social, economic, and political environments. Focusing on the findings of contemporary research, this course will explore free will, nature, and nurture from the vantage point of political science and several other academic disciplines including philosophy, sociology, anthropology, neuroscience, psychology, and genetics. By comparing the methods and assumptions of different disciplines, the course also helps situate political science within the modern university.

Learning Objectives:

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Explain how several disciplines use free will, nature, and nurture to understand why people think and act as they do
- Evaluate evidence on the causes of people's beliefs and actions
- Apply free will, nature, and nurture to a range of problems in political science and other disciplines

Required Book:

Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success*

Course Requirements:

The grading is based on one extremely short paper, two medium-length papers, a midterm exam, and a final exam. The papers will be filtered through Turnitin, a piece of

software designed to aid in the detection of plagiarism.

Grading:

- First paper: 2%
- Second paper: 17%
- Third paper: 27%
- Midterm exam: 27%
- Final exam: 27%

Religious Accommodations:

Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW’s policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at Religious Accommodations Policy, <https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/>. Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the Religious Accommodations Request form, available at <https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/>.

Disability Accommodations:

Disability Resources for Students (DRS) offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary or permanent disability that requires accommodations (this can include but is not limited to mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924, or uwdrs@uw.edu. See the DRS website at <http://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs/>

Deadlines:

For emergency situations, I’m open to a conversation about extensions—but only when I hear about the problem ahead of time, before the due date. Extensions and opportunities for making up work will not be granted when they are requested after the fact.

Academic Honesty:

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated under any circumstances. A suspected instance will be reported and disciplinary actions may ensue. For further detail about the University of Washington’s academic honesty policy, please refer the Student Conduct Code at <https://www.washington.edu/cssc/for-students/student-code-of-conduct/>

Plagiarism and VeriCite

The UW has a license agreement with Turnitin, an educational tool that helps prevent or identify plagiarism from Internet resources. Your instructor will use the service by requiring that assignments are submitted electronically to be checked by Turnitin. The Turnitin Report indicates the amount of original text in your work and whether all material that you quoted, paraphrased, summarized, or used from another source is appropriately referenced.

Technology Policy

The course meets in person. Outside of special circumstances, it is violation of the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) for students to make or distribute recordings of class sessions. Laptops are allowed during class only for purposes of note-taking and to access course materials. In the interest of minimizing potential distractions to other students from having a laptop in the seat in front of them, students using laptops will be asked to sit in the back.

Schedule of Topics

Note: I might change some of the readings, videos, and podcasts from what is listed below, but I will always give you advance notice. The course's Canvas site will link to each day's materials.

March 28 1st paper due, 8:00 PM. You will upload your paper to the course's Canvas site.

March 29 Free will, nature, and nurture in political science and other disciplines. Read/listen/watch: Closer to Truth, The Big Questions in Free Will (2016)

March 31 Free will in Western philosophy. Read/listen/watch: Julian Baggini, Do We Have Free Will? (2015); Paul Bloom, The War on Reason (2014); Robert Sapolsky, The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst (2018)

April 5 Religious ideas, determinism, and free will. Read/listen/watch: Jayaram V, Perspectives on What Karma Means (2021); Richard Phillips, The Origin of Sin (2021); Jane Dempsey Douglass, Predestination (1985); WhyIslam, Concept of God in Islam (2014)

April 7 Free will and moral responsibility. Read/listen/watch: Adrian Raine, Making a Murderer (2021); Paul Bloom, Natural Born Killers (2013); Michael Shermer, Free Will and Moral Responsibility in a Secular Society (2014); Stephen Cave, There's No Such Thing as Free Will (2016)

April 11 2nd paper due, 8:00 PM. You will upload your paper to the course's Canvas site.

April 12 Free will in political science: structure and agency. Read/listen/watch: Daron Acemoglu, Why Nations Fail (2012); Raj Chetty, Improving Equality of Opportunity (2019); Tague Rai, How Could They? (2015)

April 14 Nature and evolutionary psychology. Read/listen/watch: Frans de Waal, Moral Behavior in Animals (2012); Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, The Mind Is not a Blank Slate (2015); Cristine Legare, Why Social Science Needs Evolutionary Theory (2018); Laith Al-Shawaf, Seven Key Misconceptions about Evolutionary Psychology (2019); Laith Al-Shawaf, Evolutionary Psychology: Predictively Powerful or Just-So Stories? (2020)

April 19 Nurture and cultural anthropology. Read/listen/watch: Kwame Anthony Appiah, Honor and Moral Revolutions (2014); Whet Moser, American Violence and Southern Culture (2012); Michele Gelfand, Understanding the Cultural Codes that Drive Behavior (2019); Pew Research Center, What's Morally Acceptable (2014)

April 21 Nature and nurture: reconciling evolutionary psychology and cultural anthropology. Read/listen/watch: Susan Clancy, Abducted: How People Come to Believe They Were Abducted by Aliens, talk at Microsoft (2016); Hidden Brain, Olympic Victory and Defeat (2016); Alison Gopnik, The Gardener and the Carpenter, talk at Google (2016); Rebecca Saxe, How We Read Each Other's Minds (2009)

April 26 Nature and nurture in behavioral genetics, part I. Read/listen/watch: Robert Plomin, How DNA Makes Us Who We Are (2019); Gideon Lewis-Kraus, Can Progressives Be Convinced that Genetics Matters? (2021)

April 28 Midterm exam

May 3 Nature and nurture in behavioral genetics, part II; applying free will, nature, and nurture to success, achievement, and socio-economic status. Read/listen/watch: Freddie deBoer, Individual Genetics, Group Environments (2020); Ed Yong, A Waste of 1000 Research Papers (2019); Nancy Segal, Twin Misconceptions (2017); Gretchen Reynolds, One Twin Exercises, The Other Doesn't (2015)

May 5 Nature and nurture in behavioral genetics, part III; Read/listen/watch: Malcolm Gladwell, Outliers, Introduction and chapters 1-4, 6, 8-9, and the Epilogue (2008)

May 10 Group identity and politics. Read/listen/watch: Laurie Santos, The Roots of Racism in Rhesus Monkeys (2011); Seth Andrews, Let's Not Wake Up Like This (2019); Shadi Hamid, How Politics Replaced Religion in America (2021); Thomas Edsall, America, We Have a Problem (2020)

May 12 Political attitudes and behaviors, part I. Read/listen/watch: Robert Kurzban, Why Everybody (Else) Is a Hypocrite, talk at The Amazing Meeting (2014); Hannah Holmes, Red Brain, Blue Brain (2014); John Hibbing, Liberals and Conservatives: The Biology of Political Differences (2019); Christopher Federico, The Psychology of Political Behavior (2019)

May 16 3rd paper due by 8:00 PM. You will upload your paper to the course's Canvas site.

May 17 Political attitudes and behaviors, part II. Read/listen/watch: Julia Galef, Soldiers and Scouts: Why Our Minds Weren't Built for Truth (2019), just the first 50:45; Mark Alan Smith, The Virus of Covid Tribalism (2022)

May 19 Political attitudes and behaviors, part III. Read/listen/watch: Roy Baumeister, Do You Really Have Free Will? (2013); Glenn Wilson, The Psychology of Politics (2012); Francis Fukuyama, The Origins of Political Order, talk at the Carnegie Council (2014)

May 24 Nature and nurture in religion. Read/listen/watch: Justin Barrett, The Naturalness of Religion (2011); Ara Norenzayan, The Idea that Launched a Thousand Civilizations (2012); Kristin Laurin, Belief in God: A Cultural Adaptation with Important Side Effects (2017); Azim Shariff, Psychological and Social Consequences of Religious (Dis)belief (2015)

May 26 Nature and nurture in sex and gender. Read/listen/watch: Judith Butler, *Your Behavior Creates Your Gender* (2011); Wikipedia entry on *fa'afafine*; Carole Hooven, *The Link between Testosterone and Human Behavior* (2021); Scott Barry Kaufman, *Taking Sex Differences in Personality Seriously* (2019)

May 31 Nature and nurture in sexual orientation. Read/listen/watch: *The Economist*, *A Scientific Study Has Established That There Is No 'Gay Gene'* (2021); Robert Sapolsky, *The Toxic Intersection of Poverty and Stress* (2019). (Although it's not on today's topic, the Sapolsky interview complements themes from earlier class sessions.)

June 2 The political and policy implications of beliefs about free will, nature, and nurture. Read/listen/watch: Elizabeth Suhay, *The Political Science of Genetic Explanations* (2018); Discovery Institute, *The Wedge Document* (1998); J. P. Moreland, *Neuroscience and the Soul* (2013); Robert Frank, *Before Tea, Thank Your Lucky Stars* (2009)

June 7 Final exam, 4:30-6:20