

# Political Science 302

## Free Will, Nature, and Nurture in Politics and Society

University of Washington  
Spring 2021

Professor Mark Alan Smith  
office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:00-6:00  
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TA:  
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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 exam and two papers. The papers will be filtered through Turnitin, a piece of software designed to aid in the detection of plagiarism. The exam will cover

material from lectures and the assigned readings. Note that there is no traditional final exam during finals week. Instead, the second paper is due during finals week.

**Grading:**

Midterm exam: 30%

First paper: 35%

Second paper: 35%

**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 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](mailto:uwdrs@uw.edu). See the DRS website at <http://depts.washington.edu/uwdrs/>

**Grade Appeals Policy**

If you want to talk about the grades on your exams or papers, you are welcome to come to Christianna's office hours (Mondays from 1:30-3:30), or send her an email at [parr182@uw.edu](mailto:parr182@uw.edu). You are also welcome to come to Professor Smith's office hours (Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:00-6:00), or send him an email at [masmith@uw.edu](mailto:masmith@uw.edu).

If you want to make a formal appeal of your grade, please follow these steps:

1. Wait at least 24 hours after the return of the exams or papers.
2. Write a justification of your appeal and send it to Christianna.
3. Christianna will regrade the answers you are appealing. Through the appeal, your grade could go up, go down, or remain the same.
4. If you are dissatisfied with Christianna's response, you can appeal to Professor Smith. You will write a justification of your appeal and send it to him. Through the appeal, your grade could go up, go down, or remain the same.

**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.

## Schedule of Topics

Note: I might change some of the readings, videos, and audio recordings 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 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); Jane Dempsey Douglass, Predestination (1985); Richard Phillips, Original Sin (2021); WhyIslam, Concept of God in Islam (2020)

**April 7** Free will and moral responsibility. Read/listen/watch: Adrian Raine, Neurobiology of Violence (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 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); Tage Rai, How Could They? (2015)

**April 14** Nature and evolutionary psychology. Read/listen/watch: Frans de Waal, Moral Behavior in Animals (2012); Leda Cosmides, Evolutionary Psychology and Human Nature (2010); Laith Al-Shawaf, Seven Key Misconceptions about Evolutionary Psychology (2019); Laith Al-Shawaf, Evolutionary Psychology: Predictively Powerful or Just-So Stories? (2020); David Buss, Why Students Love Evolutionary Psychology . . . And How to Teach It (2012)

**April 19** Nurture and cultural anthropology. Read/listen/watch: Kwame Anthony Appiah, Honor and Moral Revolutions (2014); Richard Nisbett, Honor Cultures (2017); Pew Research Center, What's Morally Acceptable (2014); Marianna Pogossyan, A Big-Picture Look at Social Rules (2018); Michele Gelfand, States Are Not Divided by Red or Blue—A Deeper Difference Came before Politics (2018)

**April 21** Midterm exam

**April 26** 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 28** Nature and nurture in behavioral genetics, part I. Read/listen/watch: Robert Plomin, How DNA Makes Us Who We Are (2019); Nancy Segal, Twin Misconceptions (2017); Gretchen Reynolds, One Twin Exercises, The Other Doesn't (2015)

**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: Malcolm Gladwell, Outliers, Introduction and chapters 1-4, 6, 8-9, and the Epilogue (2008)

**May 5** Nature and nurture in behavioral genetics, part III; Read/listen/watch: nothing for today.

**May 10** Free will, nature, and nurture case studies: group identity and politics. Read/listen/watch: Laurie Santos, The Roots of Racism in Rhesus Monkeys (2011); Jonathan Haidt, The Righteous Mind, talk at Google (2012); 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** Free will, nature, and nurture case studies: 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 14** First paper due by 4:00 PM. You will upload your paper to the course's Canvas site.

**May 17** Free will, nature, and nurture case studies: 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 19** Free will, nature, and nurture case studies: political attitudes and behaviors, part II. Read/listen/watch: Julia Galef, How to Think (2021); Danny Westneat, Outbreak in Town of Republic Is a Cautionary Tale about Covid Vaccination (2021); Aallyah Wright, Republican Men Vaccine-Hesitant, But There's Little Focus on Them (2021); Emma Green, The Liberals Who Can't Quit Lockdown (2021); Veronique de Rugy, Open the Schools Already (2021)

**May 24** Free will, nature, and nurture case studies: political leadership and authority. Read/listen/watch: Mancur Olson, Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development (1993); Glenn

Wilson, *The Psychology of Politics* (2012); Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order*, talk at the Carnegie Council (2014)

**May 26** Free will, nature, and nurture case studies: sexual orientation and gender identity.  
Read/listen/watch: Judith Butler, *Your Behavior Creates Your Gender* (2011); Andrew Sullivan, *#MeToo and the Taboo Topic of Nature* (2018); Scott Barry Kaufman, *Taking Sex Differences in Personality Seriously* (2019); Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood, *Gender Identity: Nature and Nurture Working Together* (2017)

**May 31** No class (Memorial Day)

**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); Sociobiology Study Group, *Against Sociobiology* (1975)

**June 8** Second paper due by 4:00 PM. You will upload your paper to the course's Canvas site.