

PNP 496: Learning and Innateness  
Spring 2021

Meeting Time: TTH 11:30-12:45

Mode of Instruction: Synchronous online

Instructor: Dr. Zoe Jenkin

Email: zoejenkin@wustl.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-4, by appointment via Canvas (see below for sign-up instructions)

**Course Description:** What are we born knowing and what do we learn from our experience in the world? This seminar will consider which of our cognitive, perceptual, and linguistic capacities are innate, and how we acquire those that aren't. Topics to be discussed include language acquisition, perceptual learning, the "blank slate" view of human nature, intuitive physics, social cognition, and infants' moral reasoning. Readings will range from the Early Modern Rationalists and Empiricists such as Locke and Leibniz to contemporary philosophers and cognitive scientists, such as Chomsky, Gopnik, and Pinker.

**Format:** We will meet synchronously on Zoom twice a week for lecture and discussion. Course materials, announcements, Zoom links, grading rubrics, discussion board, and office hours scheduling can all be found on the Canvas site.

**Course Goals:**

- You'll develop a working knowledge of innateness debates in a variety of domains, including concepts, language, objects, number, agency, morality, causality, social rules, and economics.
- You'll develop a working knowledge of several major forms of learning, including hypothesis testing, associative learning, and perceptual learning.
- You'll become familiar with experimental methodologies that probe innateness and learning.
- You'll hone your abilities to understand and explain theories, arguments, and empirical results.
- You'll improve your skills at constructing arguments that bridge evolutionary psychology, developmental psychology, epistemology, and philosophy of mind.
- You'll develop your own views on learning and innateness.

**Requirements:**

*Readings:* There is a reading assignment for each class meeting. Readings include both philosophy and psychology articles, as well as both historical and contemporary texts. The discussions will presuppose familiarity with the assigned reading, so be sure to complete the assigned reading in advance of each lecture. Most of the readings are fun and captivating, but they can also be argumentatively tricky. I suggest reading each article twice, and taking notes on the most important considerations each author offers in support of their view.

*Attendance:* Attendance is mandatory. You are required to attend each meeting synchronously, unless in case of illness or another legitimate excuse. Any unexcused absences will detract from your attendance and participation grade. If you miss class, please

let me know as soon as possible (in advance if it is a pre-scheduled absence) and I can provide you with a recording of the course meeting.

*Participation:* This course is primarily a discussion seminar. The more you participate, the better the course will be. You should aim to make at least one contribution per class meeting. Your participation will factor into your attendance and participation grade. If you do not feel comfortable asking questions in lecture, you have two alternatives: 1) type your question/comment in the chat, or 2) after class, email your question/comment to me.

*Presentation:* You will each give one 10-minute presentation during the semester, on one of the readings from the syllabus. These presentations will begin most class meetings. You'll present the main thesis of the article, the author's main argument or empirical evidence for that thesis, and some questions for the group to discuss. You can use any format you'd like for your presentation (PowerPoint, just talking, sharing a word document etc.).

*Response Papers:* In the first half of the semester, you'll write bi-weekly 1-page papers in response to a question about the reading (a total of 4). These papers will hone your skills at succinctly summarizing evidence, and developing clear and tight arguments. These papers will also help with generating ideas for your term paper. The response papers will be graded out of 5 (as each is worth 5 points of your final grade). You will get full points if you turn the paper in on time, include all the required components, and make a good effort.

*Term Paper:* There will be one term paper for the course, of 2,500-3,000 words. You will submit a paper proposal to me, and then a draft for peer review, both of which will factor into your grade. You'll have a good amount of time to develop this paper over the second half of the semester, and get feedback from me and your peers.

### **Grading:**

Attendance and participation: 30%  
Presentation: 10%  
Response papers: 20%  
Term paper: 40%

### **Course Policies:**

Academic Integrity: The WashU Academic Integrity Policy can be found at <https://wustl.edu/about/compliance-policies/academic-policies/undergraduate-student-academic-integrity-policy/>. Please read it in full. Students who violate the academic integrity policy will receive an F on any plagiarized work and risk failing the course.

Collaboration: While all work submitted should be your own, you should feel free to discuss ideas with your classmates, read each other's paper drafts, and offer feedback. Some of the best philosophy happens this way. If you use an idea that originates with a classmate, you can cite them in your paper.

Late Papers: For response papers, for each day the paper is late it loses 1 point (out of 5 total). For the term paper, for each day it is late it loses 1/3 of a grade (e.g. from A- to B+).

Extensions: For response papers, extensions will only be given sparingly, because they are meant to be done on schedule with the course readings and discussion. For the term paper, I will be a bit looser about extensions, as I know that the end of semester can be busy. In either case, please try to ask 2-3 days in advance and provide a good reason. Good reasons include illness, family issues, multiple simultaneous deadlines for other courses, and job interviews.

Email: You are welcome to email me with questions about the course, but I won't discuss substantive philosophical issues over email. For such discussions, set up a time to meet in office hours.

Office Hours: Office hours are **Tuesdays from 2-4**, by appointment. Please make your appointment before **9 pm on Monday night**. To make an appointment, go to Canvas → calendar → find appointments → select a timeslot → reserve. If you are not free during regular office hours time, you can email me (zoejenkin@wustl.edu) to set up an alternate time.

Zoom Etiquette:

- 1) Mute your microphone when you are not speaking.
- 2) Leave your camera on whenever possible. This helps everyone stay engaged, and improves discussion. It is fine to turn your camera off occasionally for a quick stretch break or snack, if you'd like privacy.
- 3) Limit distractions during class by turning off notifications on your computer and phone, just as you would during an in-person class.
- 4) Use the "raise hand" function in the participants tab to raise your hand to ask a question or make a comment.

**Texts:**

All of the readings will be available on Canvas.

**Schedule:**

### **Unit 1: Foundations**

<i>Tues., Jan. 26</i>	Introduction
<i>Thurs., Jan. 28</i>	What is Innateness? Gross & Rey, "What is Innateness?," sections 1 and 2
<i>Tues., Feb. 2</i>	Empiricism Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> , Book 1, chs. 1-2
<i>Thurs., Feb. 4</i>	Rationalism Leibniz, <i>New Essays on Human Understanding</i> , Book 1, ch. 1

- Tues., Feb. 9 Universal Grammar I  
Laurence & Margolis, “The Poverty of the Stimulus Argument,” sections 1-3  
**Response Paper 1 Due**
- Thurs., Feb. 11 Universal Grammar II  
Laurence & Margolis, “The Poverty of the Stimulus Argument,” section 5
- Tues., Feb. 16 Fodor, *Modularity of Mind*, ch. 1, “Four Accounts of Mental Structure,” 1-23 and 37-38

## Unit 2: Core Cognition

- Thurs., Feb. 18 Objects  
Spelke, “Nativism, Empiricism, and the Origins of Knowledge”
- Tues., Feb. 23 Objections  
Haith, “Who Put the “Cog” in Infant “Cognition”?”  
**Response Paper 2 Due**
- Thurs., Feb. 25 Causality  
Leslie, “Do Six-Month-Old Infants Perceive Causality?”
- Tues., Mar. 2 **NO CLASS – WashU Wellness Day**
- Thurs., Mar. 4 Number  
Carey, *The Origin of Concepts*, ch. 4 “Core Cognition: Number,”
- Tues., Mar. 9 Agency I  
Carey, *The Origin of Concepts*, ch. 5 “Core Cognition: Agency,” 157-186  
**Response Paper 3 Due**
- Thurs., Mar. 11 Agency II  
Carey, *The Origin of Concepts*, ch. 5 “Core Cognition: Agency,” 186- 213

## Unit 3: Moral and Social Cognition

- Tues., Mar. 16 The Moral Sense  
Bloom, *Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil*, ch. 1 “The Moral Life of Babies”
- Thurs., Mar. 18 **NO CLASS – Philosophy/PNP Study Day**
- Tues., Mar. 23 Universal Moral Grammar  
Mikhail, “Universal Moral Grammar: Theory, Evidence and the Future”  
**Response Paper 4 Due**
- Thurs., Mar. 25 Emotion and Reason

Greene et al., “An fMRI Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment”

*Tues., Mar. 30*

Cheater Detection

Cosmides, Barrett, & Tooby, “Adaptive Specializations, Social Exchange, and the Evolution of Human Intelligence”

*Thurs., Apr. 1*

Monkeynomics

Santos, TedTalk, “A Monkey Economy as Irrational as Ours”

**Term Paper Proposal Due**

#### **Unit 4: Learning**

*Tues., Apr. 6*

Hypothesis Testing

Margolis & Laurence, “Learning Matters: The Role of Learning in Concept Acquisition,” sections 1-3.2

*Thurs., Apr. 8*

Beyond Hypothesis Testing

Margolis & Laurence, “Learning Matters: The Role of Learning in Concept Acquisition,” sections 3.3-6

*Tues., Apr. 13*

Scientific Learning

Gopnik, “Scientific Thinking in Young Children”

*Tues., Apr. 20*

Explanation

Lombrozo, “The Instrumental Value of Explanations”

*Thurs., Apr. 15*

Theory of Mind

Leslie, Friedman, & German, “Core Mechanisms in the Theory of Mind”

*Thurs., Apr. 22*

Perceptual Learning

Chase & Simon, “Perception in Chess”

*Tues., Apr. 27*

Peer Review Day

**Term Paper Draft Due**

*Thurs. Apr. 29*

Molyneux’s Problem

Held et al., “Newly Sighted Fail to Match Seen with Felt”

*Tues. May 4*

No reading

*Fri. May 7*

**Term Paper Due**

#### **University-Wide Policies**

##### COVID-19

Any Danforth Campus student who is **currently diagnosed with COVID-19, is experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19, or has had direct contact with a person with a**

**confirmed or suspected COVID-19 diagnosis must remain home and isolate themselves from others.** Students who have symptoms and/or do not pass the screening protocol described below must call the Habib Health and Wellness Center at 314-935-6666 for additional instructions.

#### Statement on Military Service Leave

Washington University recognizes that students serving in the U.S. Armed Forces and their family members may encounter situations where military service forces them to withdraw from a course of study, sometimes with little notice. Students may contact the Office of Military and Veteran Services at (314) 935-2609 or [veterans@wustl.edu](mailto:veterans@wustl.edu) and their academic dean for guidance and assistance. See: <https://veterans.wustl.edu/policies/policy-for-military-students/>.

#### Preferred Names and Gender Inclusive Pronouns

In order to affirm each person's gender identity and lived experiences, it is important that we ask and check in with others about pronouns. This simple effort can make a profound difference in a person's experience of safety, respect, and support. See: <https://registrar.wustl.edu/student-records/ssn-name-changes/preferred-name/>

#### Reporting Sexual Assault

If a student discusses or discloses an instance of sexual assault, sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking, or if a faculty member otherwise observes or becomes aware of such an allegation, they will keep the information as private as possible, but as a faculty member of Washington University, they are required to immediately report it to the Department Chair or Dean or directly to Ms. Jessica Kennedy, the University's Title IX Director, at (314) 935-3118, [jwkennedy@wustl.edu](mailto:jwkennedy@wustl.edu). Additionally, you can report incidents or complaints to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards or by contacting WUPD at (314) 935-5555. Students who wish to speak with a confidential resource may wish to reach out to the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center (RSVP) at 935-8761 or by visiting the fourth floor of Seigle Hall.

#### Accommodations for Sexual Assault

The University is committed to offering reasonable academic accommodations (e.g., a no-contact order, course changes) to students who are victims of relationship or sexual violence, regardless of whether they seek criminal or disciplinary action. If you a student needs to request such accommodations, please have them contact the Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center (RSVP) at [rsvpcenter@wustl.edu](mailto:rsvpcenter@wustl.edu) or (314) 935-3445 to schedule an appointment with an RSVP confidential and licensed counselor. Information shared with counselors is confidential. However, requests for accommodations will be coordinated with the appropriate University administrators and faculty.

#### Accommodations for Disabled Students

Washington University in St. Louis supports the rights of enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity and, in compliance with federal, state, and local requirements, is committed to reasonable accommodations for individuals with documented disabilities. Disabled students for whom accommodations may be necessary must be registered with, and provide their instructors official notification through, WUSTL's **Disability Resources** (<https://students.wustl.edu/disability-resources/>). Once established, responsibility for disability-related accommodations and access is shared by DR, faculty, and the student. Please contact Disability Resources at 314.935.5970 or [disabilityresources@wustl.edu](mailto:disabilityresources@wustl.edu).

### Emergency Preparedness

Before an emergency, familiarize yourself with the building(s) that you frequent. Know the layout, including exit locations, stairwells and the Emergency Assembly Point (EAP). Review the “Quick Guide for Emergencies” that is found near the door in many classrooms for specific emergency information and instructions. For additional Information and EAP maps, visit [emergency.wustl.edu](http://emergency.wustl.edu). To ensure that you receive emergency notifications, make sure your information and cell phone number is updated in SIS, and/or download. The WUSTL app and enable notifications.

To report an emergency:

Danforth Campus: (314) 935-5555

School of Medicine Campus: (314) 362-4357 North/West/South and Off Campus: 911 then (314) 935-5555

### **Resources:**

#### Disability Resources

At Washington University we strive to make the academic experience accessible and inclusive. If you anticipate or experience barriers based on disability, please contact Disability Resources at 314.935.5970, [disabilityresources@wustl.edu](mailto:disabilityresources@wustl.edu), or visit our website for information about requesting academic accommodations. See: <https://students.wustl.edu/disability-resources/>.

#### The Writing Center

The Writing Center, located in Olin Library, offers free one-on-one writing tutorials to WashU students, as well as workshops designed to help students become better writers. The Writing Center staff can assist by providing feedback on the strength of an argument, clarity, and organization. Contact them at 935-4981 or [writing@wustl.edu](mailto:writing@wustl.edu).

#### The Learning Center

The Learning Center works collaboratively with University partners to provide undergraduate students key resources, like academic peer mentoring, to enhance their academic progress. Contact them at [learningcenter.wustl.edu](http://learningcenter.wustl.edu) to find out what support they may offer for your classes.

#### Mental Health Services

Mental Health Services’ professional staff members work with students to resolve personal and interpersonal difficulties, many of which can affect a student’s academic experience. These include conflicts with or worry about friends and family, concerns about eating or drinking patterns, and feelings of anxiety and depression. For more information, visit: [www.students.wustl.edu/mental-health-services/](http://www.students.wustl.edu/mental-health-services/).

#### Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center (RSVP)

The Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Center (RSVP) offers support for those who have experienced sexual violence, sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence or stalking. RSVP can help those who are not sure what steps they wish to take to respond to their experiences. They offer confidential support and can help arrange for necessary classroom accommodations. To get help, contact the RSVP Center at 935-3445 or [rsvpcenter@wustl.edu](mailto:rsvpcenter@wustl.edu). Their office is located in Seigle Hall, Suite 435.

#### Bias Report and Support System (BRSS)

The University has a process through which students, faculty, staff, and community members who have experienced or witnessed incidents of bias, prejudice, or discrimination against a student can report their experiences to the University's Bias Report and Support System (BRSS) team. To report an instance of bias, visit [www.brss.wustl.edu](http://www.brss.wustl.edu).

#### WashU Cares

WashU Cares, within the Health and Wellness Unit, provides resources to all students on the Danforth Campus who may be having a hard time. WashU Cares is committed to helping create a culture of caring. Through proactive, collaborative, and systemic approaches, they work with students to identify interventions, resources, and supports that allow them to be successful. If there is a concern about the physical or mental well-being of a student, please file a report on their website. See: <https://washucares.wustl.edu/>.

#### Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI)

The Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) supports and advocates for undergraduate, graduate, and professional school students from underrepresented and/or marginalized populations, collaborates with campus and community partners, and promotes dialogue and social change to cultivate and foster a supportive campus climate for students of all backgrounds, cultures, and identities. See: <https://diversityinclusion.wustl.edu/>