

## The Social Mind

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**Start date** 19 February 2016**End date** 21 February 2016**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge**Tutor** Dr Gillian Ragsdale**Course code** 1516NRX117**Director of Programmes**

Emma Jennings

**For further information on this  
course, please contact**Public Programme Co-ordinator, Clare Kerr  
[clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk) or 01223 746237**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

Gillian Ragsdale developed an interest in anthropology while working in educational publishing for the Middle East and Africa. Combining this with a long-standing interest in evolutionary biology and philosophy, she undertook a Masters and Ph.D. in Biological Anthropology at Cambridge. Her main area of interest is the evolution and biology of the mind and behaviour - especially in the contexts of social behaviour, family dynamics, kinship and the role of epigenetics in mediating gene-environment interaction. Gillian currently teaches psychology with the Open University.

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## Course programme

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### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
20:30 – 22:00	<b>What is special about the social mind?</b>
22:00	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	<b>The evolving social mind: how special are we?</b>
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	<b>The many faces of empathy.</b>
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	<b>The biology of trust and mistrust.</b>
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	<b>Reciprocity, altruism and spite.</b>
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	<b>Pathologies of the social mind.</b>
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	<b>The group mind in cooperation and conflict.</b>
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

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## Course syllabus

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### Aims:

This course aims to introduce the skills that characterise the social mind, how they come to vary, some of the ways these are thought to have evolved and what happens when social individuals come together in groups – for better and for worse.

### Content:

The following topics will be introduced and discussed:

- The skills that characterise and facilitate a social mind such as theory of mind and empathy. We will take a closer look at empathy, which is not a single, well-defined trait but is commonly used to refer to a range of responses from emotional contagion to taking another person's perspective.
- Some of the evolutionary processes that may have driven the evolution of social behaviour, especially in the human lineage. Some of these key behaviours include: altruism, reciprocity and spite.
- The drive to behave prosocially or antisocially is strongly influenced by feelings of trust and mistrust which in turn are strongly influenced by genetic and environmental factors working together. We will look at how our biology interprets signals from the environment to determine whether being social is really the best strategy.
- The human mind is unusually complex but this also makes it vulnerable. Social behaviour varies – but when does normal variation grade into pathology? We will look at some very different kinds of currently recognised pathologies of the social mind, such as psychopathy and autism.
- Many social animals, such as humans, are drawn together into groups. Co-operation between group members can greatly improve life for the whole group – but the tension between co-operation and competition *between* groups continues to take its toll in human misery. What drives groups to co-operate or compete – and is conflict inevitable?

### Presentation of the course:

Lectures, class discussion and debate, activities.

**Outcomes:**

**As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:**

- Understand that a social mind has certain key characteristics: an intelligent mind is not necessarily social – social skills are special.
- Understand some of the genetic and environmental factors that combine to influence the social mind.
- Appreciate how social skills come to vary – and how some variations are viewed as normal while others are classed as pathological.
- Understand some of the issues affecting how individuals become heavily influenced by their inclusion or exclusion from different kinds of groups – and how groups interact with each other.

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

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Author	Title	Publisher and date
Steven Pinker	<i>The Better Angels of Our Nature</i>	Penguin 2011
Paul Zak	<i>The Moral Molecule</i>	Corgi 2012
Frans de Waal	<i>Primates and Philosophers</i>	Princeton University Press 2006
Simon Baron-Cohen	<i>The Essential Difference: Men, Women and the Extreme Male Brain</i>	Penguin 2003

## Website addresses

**Note** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*Information correct as of:* 12 January 2016