Lecture 1 - Introduction

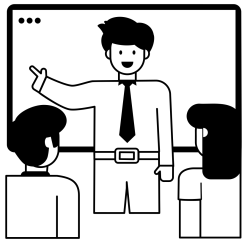
The Social Brain: Critical Perspectives on Science, Society and Neurodiversity

Richard Ramsey

Today

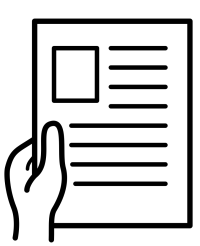
Part 1

- Introduction to the course



Part 2

- Read articles and discuss



Part 1 - Introduction

Who will be teaching?

- Dr. Richard Ramsey
- Please just call me Rich

- I’m originally from Leeds (UK)
- BSc. and PhD (University of Birmingham, UK)
- Postdoctoral work (UK and Belgium)
- Since 2011, I’ve co-directed a cognitive neuroscience lab as a faculty member at Bangor University (UK) and Macquarie University (Australia)
- I’ve been at ETH since 2023

What are my lab's research interests?

Themes

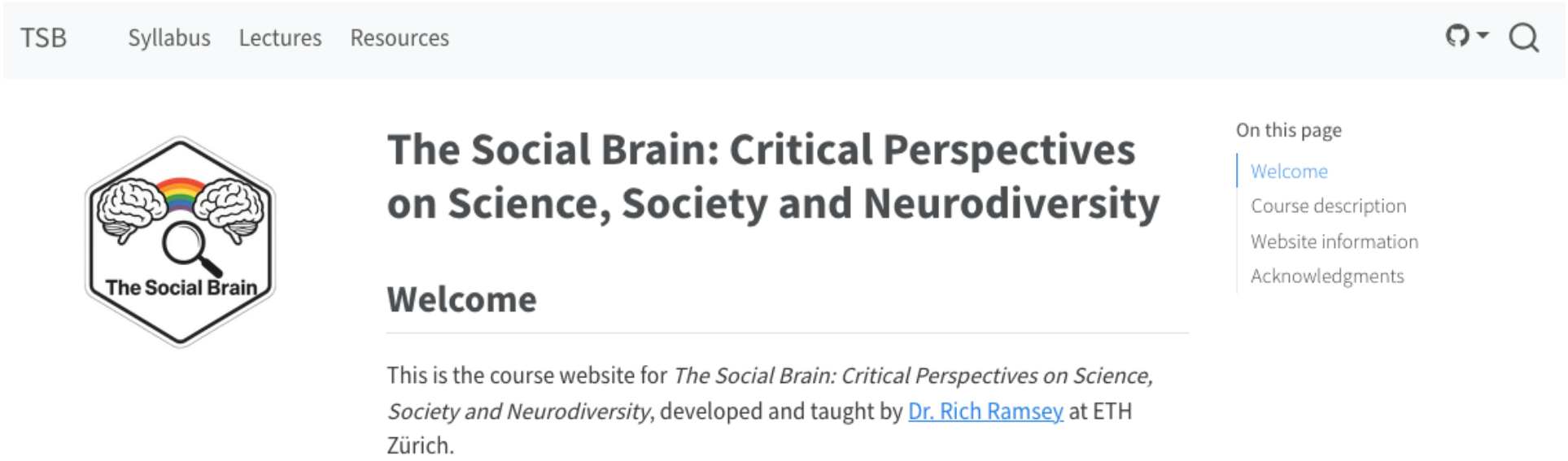
- Social Cognitive Neuroscience
- Person percetion
- Loneliness
- Meta science
- Open science

Methods

- Experimental psychology
- Human neuroscience (e.g., fMRI)
- "Big Data"
- Computational modelling

www.rich-ramsey.com

Course website

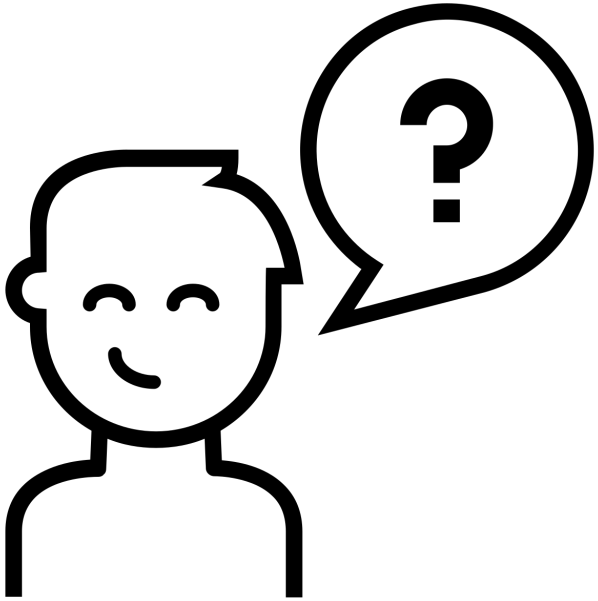


- Course website
- This has all the good stuff
- Let's take a look…

Contact details

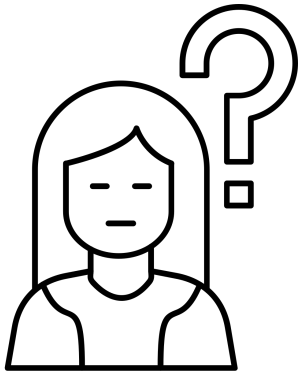
- Speak to me in class - this is the best place to raise questions and discuss ideas.

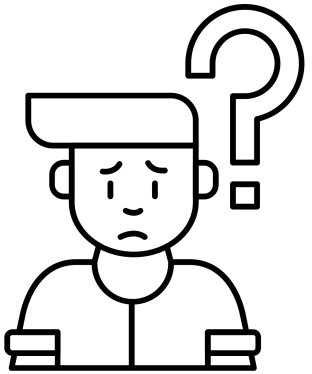
- Email: richard.ramsey [at] hest.ethz.ch



Notes on lectures

- Slides will be posted on the course website before each lecture.





- **Most important of all:** if you don't understand something, then **PLEASE** interrupt me and ask a question. No doubt other students in the class are stuck with the same issue.

Part 1 - Syllabus

Course content

Themes

- Research quality and integrity
- Social neuroscience
- Neurodiversity

Skills

- Critical evaluation of scientific evidence, data and theory
- Develop independent thinking skills
- Appreciate how understandign neurodviersity impacts basic research and society in general

Learning Outcomes

- To examine critically how neuroscientific concepts, theories, and findings relate to broader historical, moral, and social contexts, enhancing reflective competencies.

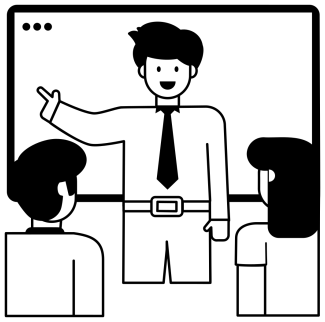
- To question the production and validation of scientific evidence within the context of the replication crisis, enabling students to evaluate how knowledge is created, validated, and communicated.

- To understand how conceptualising cognitive variation as a natural continuum challenges deficit-focused models, promoting more inclusive frameworks for society.

- To develop effective communication skills for translating complex scientific concepts to diverse audiences, fostering public understanding of science.

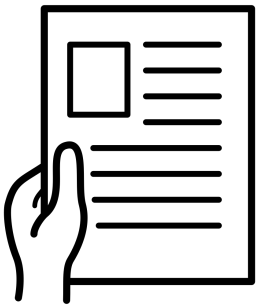
Format

- Lectures will be split into two sections with a short break in the middle.



- I will present material in the first half.

- In the second half, students will break into small groups and have time to read and discuss relevant papers from that week's material.



Small group work

- Students have the opportunity to discuss any questions arising from the previous lecture, as well as coursework.
- A journal article will be provided from the previous lecture as a starting point for this discussion.
- Group discussion sessions are an excellent way to clarify understanding and develop ideas for your assignment.

Schedule

Week	Date	Title	Description
1	**Sep 16**	Intro	Introduction to the course
2	**Sep 23**	Crisis Part 1	Is psychological science in a crisis?
3	**Sep 30**	Crisis Part 2	The reform movement in psychological science
4	**Oct 7**	No lecture	
5	**Oct 14**	Crisis Part 3	Are there problems in psychological theory?
6	**Oct 21**	Crisis Part 4	Does the crisis extend beyond psychology?
7	**Oct 28**	Social Neuroscience 1	Core foundations
8	**Nov 4**	Social Neuroscience 2	Current applications
9	**Nov 11**	Neurodiversity 1	Re-thinking neurodiversity
10	**Nov 18**	Neurodiversity 2	Guest lecture: A view from the clinic
11	**Nov 25**	Neurodiversity 3	Loneliness
12	**Dec 2**	Neurodiversity 4	Autism
13	**Dec 9**	Neurodiversity 5	Attention and Impulsivity
14	**Dec 16**	Essay Writing	Guidelines and best practices

Topics

- Introduction
- Crisis and reform
- Social neuroscience
- Neurodiversity
- Essay writing Q&A

Part 1 - Assessment

Assessment type

- There is one piece of assessment in this course, which is a written assignment in essay format.
- 2000 words maximum.
- Submission date: Monday January 6th, 2026.
- **There is NO exam**

Assessment format

You can write your essay in two different ways.

1. Address a general question.

e.g., Is psychology a science or a pseudoscience?

2. Address a more specific question.

e.g., Should Autism be considered one diagnosis or multiple different diagnoses?

Part 1 - Writing tips

Narrow focus

- Your essay should have a narrow focus, I do not want a detailed literature review.
- You are not being assessed on the breadth of your knowledge. Therefore, I will not mark you down for having a narrow focus.
- However, I expect a very clear and well-supported rationale for your critical viewpoint and future direction.
- I will reward attempts to think on your own

Keep it simple !!!

- Find an experiment or topic from my lectures that interests you
- Go away and read around the topic
- Think of a feature that limits understanding – i.e., be critical – and suggest a way to extend current knowledge

Plan, plan and plan some more

- Plan your written assignment BEFORE you start to write. You will find it easier to write if you organise your ideas first into a structure.
- Consider the balance of your assignment, in terms of the amount of text per section.
- Make multiple plans, rather than one. One page A4 per plan.
- Review the plans and consider revision and/or consolidation.

Writing style

- Clarity is crucial
- If you can say it with less words, do so (i.e., keep sentences short).
- Try to link paragraphs to promote the flow and pace of your writing
- Have a friend or classmate read it

Part 1 - Summary

- Introduction
- Syllabus
- Assessment
- Writing tips

Take a break

Part 2 - Read articles and discuss

Discussion material

- Here are some accessible (i.e., non-technical) blog posts that cover the main themes in the course.
- Read these to kick-start a discussion in your group.

- Crisis and reform
- Social neuroscience
- Neurodiversity