



SPRING 2016  
PROSEMINAR

# MINDSHAPING

Thursdays

5:10-7:00 pm

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What makes humans unique in the animal kingdom? According to one recent philosophical theory, it is mindshaping. More than any other mammal, we shape each other's minds to respect prevalent norms of conduct. These multifarious mindshaping practices and mechanisms are arguably the secret to our evolutionary success: they enable us to solve problems of coordination in cooperative projects involving large numbers of other human beings, many of whom are personally unknown to us. We are so much better at coordinating on complex projects than other mammals because, from a young age, we are shaped to act as most expect us to act.

This seminar will involve exploration and critical evaluation of this philosophical hypothesis about what makes humans distinctive. Reviewing both empirical data and philosophical assumptions and implications, the seminar will explore the human drive to shape minds. Topics covered will include the exceptional susceptibility of human infants to mindshaping, through pedagogy and high-fidelity imitation, our irresistible tendency to institute and enforce norms, and our drive to identify with groups and stereotypes, and to tacitly enforce these stereotypes.