

## **The Social Brain: Exploring the Brain Mechanisms Behind Social Interactions & Behavior**

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### **Course Description:**

Human beings are inherently social creatures, so that all aspects of our cognition and behavior are to some extent social. As humans we have the unique ability to understand different social contexts, to emphasize and to reason about our own and other people's intentions, motives, and beliefs. The goal of this course is to explore the brain processes behind such human behaviors and social interactions.

First, we will lay the foundation for understanding the 'Social Brain' by reviewing the basic underlying brain mechanisms and the developmental stages of the brain. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the course, we will address specific social behaviors such as empathy, theory of mind, social disorders, and their neuronal basis. And third, we will explore "plasticity," the brain's capability to be shaped by cultural and environmental influences, social interactions, and contemplative practice. In this course, both social psychology and neuroscience inform our understanding of social behavior, with each discipline offering a complementing perspective.