

**Date:** 2/22/12

**To:** Professor Tony Scarlatos

**From:** Katherine Chu, chuchootrain@gmail.com

**Subject of my paper:** Mind-reading

**My Major and why writing about this topic will be beneficial to me:**

The science of mind-reading has huge implications in political science, which is also incidentally my major. If you think lying is a necessary tool to get through life unscathed (“Of course your butt doesn’t look big”), think about how much more significant it is to politicians. *Lies make up the foundation of politics*. If mind-reading technologies exist, how on earth can politicians preserve their livelihood without their holy grail?

Personally, I think that mind-reading has the potential to make politics extremely entertaining. Not only would it be hilarious to watch politicians humiliate themselves, but it would also result in a political system that values sincerity over canned one-liners and false promises. A party system would be hard to sustain without the semblance of loyalty that dishonesty permits, but I only see that as a good thing. Instead of looking at a politician in the context of his party (and engaging in pointless debates about who best embodies the party’s ideology), the public can focus on the politician as an individual and judge his candidacy based on the sole merit of his ideas.

The truly scary prospect, however, is the effect mind-reading would have on relations between the state and the individual. In a world in which the authorities can read people’s thoughts, would there be any freedom left?

**My thesis (subject to change):** Mind-reading technologies have significant implications for the future of society politically, socially, and morally, but are unlikely to result in a dystopia for multiple reasons.

**Approach to the subject of my paper:**

First, I would explain the current technologies of mind-reading. There are many in progress, and they are all different from each other. One approach looks at the visual cortex of the brain under fMRI scanning, and matches the brain pattern to a pattern-detection algorithm to get a vague sense of what the image was. Another approach links mind-reading with the computer. A person wears a headset that can detect general electrical signals from the brain, and sends them to a computer. Sophisticated software interprets those signals and, in turn, tells a machine what to do. Yet another entirely different approach centers on deciphering the thoughts of brain-damaged patients who cannot speak. I will compare and contrast the different technologies involved in reading the mind’s pictorial thoughts as opposed to the mind’s verbal thoughts, and will define any unfamiliar terms along the way. Because science is not my forte I won’t go into too much

detail about the mechanisms of the machine, but a basic and succinct explanation will be included for each approach.

The rest of my paper will discuss the implications of the research. I will talk about the future of mind-reading based on the current research, and make conjectures about how it will be used. At this point, I will give a breakdown of the morals and ethics of mind-reading, and reference a few of my favorite political philosophers (e.g. John Locke, John Stuart Mill). Does mind-reading inherently violate an individual's freedom and self-determination? Can society remain a society with mind-reading? In what way will politics change with the development of mind-reading? In what way will human-to-human interactions/relationships change?

After answering those big scary questions, I will backpedal and argue that unlike many science-fiction authors, I don't think that mind-reading technology will be abused. Why? Inconvenience. The only way to read someone else's mind right now is if the person gives his or her express permission in the form of a contract (which links back to politics). Even then, the person's mind can be read only vaguely at best. I can't say that mind-reading technology won't progress to the point where any individual can have access to another individual's brain without consent *ever*, but humanity is safe from Big Brother for the next few centuries. I might talk about the nature of man (inherently good or inherently evil?) if I'm up to it. On that cautiously optimistic note, I will end the paper.

### **Intended audience:**

My paper will be directed toward fellow college students. I will not presume any prior knowledge in science or politics, and strive to explain everything in a way that is easy to understand.

After reading my paper, readers will get a better idea of the relationship between politics and science. (Contrary to popular opinion, the two are not entirely unrelated.) Not only will they learn about the basic logistics of this new technology, but they will also be able to understand its impact on society morally as well as ethically. Mostly, my essay will get people to think about how scary technology can be.

**Graphs or charts:** Still deciding which ones to use...

**Documentation Style:** APA

**Kinds of sources I will use and why they will benefit my paper:** Internet sources, magazines (e.g. The Economist), newspapers (e.g. New York Times), scholarly journals, video stations, YouTube videos, TV

My sources are pretty balanced. Because there is very little overlap between each source, I have a wide breadth of information on my topic.

**Tentative List of References:**

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