Poli 891
Fall 2011
Prof. Baumgartner

Questions for Week 6, Oct 10. Write a one-page paper on one of the topics below and use these topic questions to prepare for class discussion as you do the readings.

Readings: Jones, Simon.

1. What is bounded rationality? Be precise and complete.

2. If people are purposive and goal-seeking, are they therefore rational? Explain and be specific.

3. List the most important "non-rational" components of human cognition and decision-making, from this week's readings.

4. What is the role of emotion in this literature? Is emotion rational?

5. Where do preferences come from? How do we know if someone is changing their preference or if they are just changing their behavior because they think their preference will be better served by a different choice? That is, can we distinguish between preferences and other possible reasons for a change in behavior? If not, where does that leave us?

6. How important is the complexity of a decision? Are some decisions simple enough that a rational model is a good approximation of how people approach it? At what point are decisions complex enough that we have to build this factor into our models? Give examples that are clearly "simple," clearly "complex," and some that might be at the borderline. Explain.

7. How do people weight different dimensions of a choice? Compare the importance of your preferences along a dimension to your different possible weightings of different dimensions in making a complex decision. Use any example you want but be precise in your analysis or simulation of the problem. Examples could involve consumer choices like buying a car (what gas mileage, what ease of repair, what safety features, how cool it is?) from your personal life (what college / grad program to go to?) or from public policy (should a member of Congress vote for health care reform even if he does not like certain parts of it?).