York University, 2006/2007
Department of Psychology, Faculty of Health
Theories of Human Nature: 4220 6.0D (Y)
Course Director: Dr. Thomas Teo

Time
Wednesday: 8:30-11:30

Seminar room
207 BSB

Thomas Teo
231 BSB
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Office hours: By appointment
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http://www.yorku.ca/tteo

Secretary
Barbara Thurston (283 BSB)

Prerequisites
See 2006/2007 Supplemental Calendar

Course Description

• In the Fall term we analyze general Western worldviews of human nature. The implications of these theories of human nature for psychological research and practice are discussed. In the Winter term we focus on the conceptualization of human nature in biological determinism, using examples from the history of measuring bodies and minds. We will analyze the idea that humanity can be divided into “races” and its implications in psychology and the social sciences.

Organization of the Seminar

• Lectures, seminar presentations, discussions, audiovisual material.

Learning Objectives

• Developing the art of analyzing and evaluating psychological ideas.
• Understanding the significance of hidden assumptions (such as theories of human nature) for psychology.
• Learning about the constructive and harmful consequences of science.
• Improving presentation skills, thinking, and the written expression of ideas.

Reading material: Fall term


Tentative Outline: Fall term

September 6:  
First class meeting: Introduction.

September 13:  
Lecture on critical thinking regarding theories of human nature.

September 20:  
Lecture on critical thinking, reading, and understanding texts.  
READ:  
Theories: Chapter 1: Introduction.  
Chapter 2: Essentialism, Materialism, and Idealism.

September 27:  
Classical theories. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.  
READ:  
Theories: Chapter 3: Aristotle.  
First student presentations!  
First summary / comment for September 27 meeting is due on September 25 (Monday) at 13:00 (see below).

October 4:  
Christianity. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.  
READ:  
Theories: Chapter 4: Christian philosophy of human nature.  

October 11:  
Liberalism. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.  
READ:  
Theories: Chapter 5: Liberalism.  

October 18:  
Conservative individualism. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.  
READ:  
Theories: Chapter 6: Conservative individualism.  

October 25:  
Rousseau and Marx. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.  
READ:  
Theories: Chapter 7: Rousseau & Chapter 8: Marx.  

November 1:  
Darwin. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.  
READ:  
Theories: Chapter 9: Darwin.  

November 8:  
Freud. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.  
READ:  
Theories: Chapter 10: Freud.  

November 15:  
Non-self theories. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.  
READ:  
Theories: Chapter 11: Non-self theories.  

November 22:  
Feminism. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.  
READ:  
Theories: Chapter 12: Feminism  

November 29:  
Individualized advising for paper preparation [optional].  
Exams (for students with more than two missed meetings)
Reading material: Winter term (tentative)


Of Interest


Tentative Winter Term Outline

January 3: Introduction.

January 10: Race and racism. 
READ: Winston: Chapter 1 (Weizmann: Type and essence)

January 17: Knowledge and racism. 

First comment in Winter term is due on January 15!

January 24: Plato, Agassiz, Morton. 

January 31: Galton, Broca, Lombroso. 

February 2, 2007: Deadline for withdrawing from course without receiving a grade.

February 7: IQ. 

February 14: Reading week [February 12-16].
February 21: IQ.

February 28: Reification.

March 7: How to make human into problems: Case example of mixed race.
READ: (a) Winston: Chapter 3 (Teo: The historical problematization of “mixed race” in psychological and human-scientific discourses)
(b) Winston: Chapter 4 (Tucker: “Inharmoniously adapted to each other”: Science and racial crosses).

March 14: Cultural contexts.
READ: (a) Winston: Chapter 5 (Richards: “It’s an American Thing”: The “race” and intelligence controversy from a British perspective)
(b) Winston: Chapter 7 (Constructing difference: Heredity, intelligence, and race in textbooks, 1930-1970).

March 21: From apartheid to anti-racism.
READ: (a) Winston: Chapter 6 (Louw & Foster: Race and psychology in South Africa)
(b) Winston: Chapter 8 (Philips: Antiracist work in the desegregation era: The scientific activism of Kenneth Bancroft Clark).

March 28: Reflections on epistemological violence.
No comment necessary.
READ: Gould (1996): Introduction to the revised and expanded edition: Thoughts at age fifteen (pp. 19-50);
A positive conclusion (Chapter 7, pp. 351-364);
The critique of The Bell Curve (pp. 367-390).

Exams (for students with more than two missed meetings in the Winter term): During official exam period.

Evaluation

Regular attendance and participation:

- There are no regular exams in this course.
- In order to ensure that the material has been reflected upon adequately, regular attendance and participation is necessary.
- **If more than 2 meetings in the Fall term are missed, the student must take an exam regarding the missed meetings** (regardless of the reasons for missing class) on November 29, 2006.
- **If more than 2 meetings in the Winter term are missed, the student must take an exam regarding the missed meetings** (regardless of the reasons for missing class) during the official examination period at the end of the Winter term.
- Missed meetings or lack thereof in the Fall term do not carry over to the Winter term!
Presentation in class:

- One presentation in the Fall term and one presentation in the Winter term.
- The course not only increases knowledge on a particular subject matter but also trains academic qualifications such as presentation skills and leading class discussions.
- The duration of the presentation (and leading a class discussion) for each student should be approximately 30 minutes (longer if a video is shown).
- Assessment of the presentation by the whole group is taken into account. Written assessments by class include sections on "Strengths," "Suggestions for Improvement," and a "Grade." Averaged grades and feedback are provided usually one week after the presentation.
- The presentation must go beyond class reading material and include additional sources. The presentation may include audiovisual material and class discussions may involve quizzes, tests, academic games, and so on.
- Presentations can be done individually or as a group effort.
- PowerPoint (or a similar presentation software) or transparencies are recommended.
- Provide an electronic copy of your PowerPoint presentation or of your transparencies at least 12 hours before your presentation (send to instructor via email).
- The presentation (and leading a class discussion) in the Fall term counts towards 30% of the Fall grade.
- The presentation (and leading a class discussion) in the Winter term counts towards 30% of the Winter grade.
- Grading for each presentation: Instructor: 50%. Peers: 50%. Letter grades will be used (A+, A, B+, etc.) which are converted into grade points (A+ = 9, A = 8, B+ = 7, etc.) which are averaged (for instance, B+ ranges from 6.5 to 7.49).

Paper:

- The written elaboration of the presentation into a manuscript is required: One paper in the Fall term and one paper in the Winter term.
- Fall: Based on the presentation. The paper must include a section on the relevance of a particular theory of human nature to psychology.
- Winter: Based on the presentation. Address relevance for psychology.
- Each paper must be written in APA format and have a length of 16 pages including references. References must be drawn from at least 15 different academic sources. Use subheadings but do not add empty lines.
- The deadline for the Fall paper is January 3 (first Winter class meeting). There will be deductions for late submissions.
- The deadline for the Winter paper is April 4. There will be deductions for late submissions.
- Deductions: Each day late will count as a deduction of 0.15 for the first two days, 0.25 for the next two days, 0.35 for the next two days, etc. This means if you receive an average A for the paper and you are two days late you would receive: 8 – 0.30 = 7.7 (which is still an A).
- All papers must be sent as an e-mail attachment to the instructor [criterion for date of submission] and handed in as a hardcopy until Friday.
- More information on guidelines for the paper will be provided in one of the class meetings in September or October.
- The Fall paper represents 40% of the Fall grade.
• The Winter paper represents 40% of the Winter grade.
• Grading: Letter grades.

Summary/Comments:

(a) Summary (only the Fall term!):

• **200-250 words** on the “Theories” chapters (use the word count function in your word processing program and list the number of words at the end of the summary). Do not use references! Do not use direct quotes in summary.
• The term summary refers to writing an abstract of the chapter. It should be accurate, concise, informative, non-evaluative, coherent, and readable.
• In the summary you should be aware of the difference between primary and secondary sources [Wrong: "Aristotle argued …;" Correct: "According to Loptson (2006), Aristotle argued …"] [Reason: Loptson provides an interpretation of theories of human nature that might be adequate or inadequate].
• **No summaries are required in the Winter term**

(b) Comments (Fall)

• **250-300 words** on Loptson (1998) readings (use the word count function in your word processing program and list the number of words at the end of the comments). Do not count references and direct quotes!
• A comment should be evaluative, provide arguments, and express a viewpoint. It contains the student’s assessment of the readings.
• Choose 2-4 significant issues that are addressed in the readings and comment on them.
• **All** readings must be discussed.
• Summaries and comments are due on each Monday at 13:00 and must be sent to my e-mail address (see above) (as an attachment or in the main text).
• **Write your name at the top of the comment!** Write 4220 in the "subject" heading of the e-mail.
• There will be deductions for late submissions and summaries/comments received on Tuesday after 15:00 will not be accepted anymore (Exception: documented medical reasons).
• The first comment is due on September 25 for the September 27 meeting.
• Comments are usually returned on Wednesdays.
• It is the responsibility of the student to make sure that all comments were handed back to them.
• Summaries / comments represent 30% of the Fall grade.
• For the **day of one’s own presentation**, no summary / comments need to be submitted!
• If the day of comment submission falls on a holiday, comments must be submitted 1, 2, or 3 days earlier.

(b) Comments (Winter)

• **500-600 words** on all assigned readings (use the word count function in your word processing program and list the number of words at the end of the comments). Do not count references and direct quotes!
• A comment should be evaluative, provide arguments, and express a viewpoint. It contains the student's assessment of the readings.
• **Comment on essential issues of the reading material! Do not summarize material.**
• Comments are due on each **Monday at 13:00** and must be sent to my e-mail address (see above) (as an attachment or in the main text).
• **Write your name at the top of the comment!** Write 4220 in the "subject" heading of the e-mail.
• There will be **deductions for late submissions** and summaries/comments received on Tuesday after 15:00 will not be accepted anymore (Exception: documented medical reasons).
• The first Winter comment is due on January 15 for the January 17 meeting.
• Comments are usually returned on Wednesdays.
• It is the responsibility of the student to make sure that all comments were handed back to them.
• Comments represent 30% of the Winter grade.
• For the day of one's own presentation, no summary/comments need to be submitted!
• If the day of comment submission falls on a holiday, comments must be submitted 1, 2, or 3 days earlier.

• Grading: Each summary / comment or comment will receive a qualitative grade: outstanding (exceptional) = A+; excellent = A; Very good = B+; Good = B; Competent = C+; fairly competent = C; Passing = D; marginally Passing = D; Failing = E and F. In the Fall and Winter these qualitative comments are converted into grade points (A+ = 9, A = 8, B+ = 7, etc.) and averaged.
• **You are allowed to miss 1 summary/comment (one Monday submission) in the Fall and 1 comment (one Monday submission) in the Winter!**

The final grade in this course is based equally on the grades of the Fall and Winter terms.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Comment</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Presentation</strong></td>
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Final course grades may be adjusted to conform to Program or Faculty grades distribution profiles!
IMPORTANT COURSE INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Academic Honesty and Integrity
York students are required to maintain high standards of academic integrity and are subject to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty (http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/legislation/senate/acadhone.htm). There is also an academic integrity website with complete information about academic honesty. Students are expected to review the materials on the Academic Integrity website (http://www.yorku.ca/academicintegrity/students.htm).

Access/Disability
York provides services for students with disabilities (including physical, medical, learning and psychiatric disabilities) needing accommodation related to teaching and evaluation methods/materials. It is the student's responsibility to register with disability services as early as possible to ensure that appropriate academic accommodation can be provided with advance notice. You are encouraged to schedule a time early in the term to meet with each professor to discuss your accommodation needs. Failure to make these arrangements may jeopardize your opportunity to receive academic accommodations. Additional information is available at www.yorku.ca/disabilityservices or from disability service providers:

Religious Observance Accommodation
York University is committed to respecting the religious beliefs and practices of all members of the community, and making accommodations for observances of special significance to adherents. Should any of the dates specified in this syllabus for an in-class test or examination pose such a conflict for you, contact the Course Director within the first three weeks of class. Similarly, should an assignment to be completed in a lab, practicum placement, workshop, etc., scheduled later in the term pose such a conflict, contact the Course director immediately. Please note that to arrange an alternative date or time for an examination scheduled in the formal examination periods (December and April/May), students must complete an Examination Accommodation Form, which can be obtained from Student Client Services, Student Services Centre or online at http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/pdf/exam_accommodation.pdf

Student Conduct
Students and instructors are expected to maintain a professional relationship characterized by courtesy and mutual respect and to refrain from actions disruptive to such a relationship. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the instructor to maintain an appropriate academic atmosphere in the classroom, and the responsibility of the student to cooperate in that endeavour. Further, the instructor is the best person to decide, in the first instance, whether such an atmosphere is present in the class. A statement of the policy and procedures involving disruptive and/or harassing behaviour by students in academic situations is available on the York website http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/legislation/senate/harass.htm

Please note that this information is subject to periodic update. For the most current information, please go to the CCAS webpage (see Reports, Initiatives, Documents): http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate_cte_main_pages/ccas.htm.
Example Summary/Comment (by student)

Summary

In his conclusion, Loptson notes that the biological and non-self theories of human nature as well as the theories of human nature propounded by Freud, Marx, Rousseau and those who advocated the liberal view all tried to create a science of humankind. On the other hand, some feminists and Christian philosophers believe for different reasons that a complete science of human nature is impossible. The eleven theories according to Loptson also differ on whether and the extent to which they believe humans are distinct from nature and the animal domain. Theorists who believed that there are not marked discontinuities between humans and animals include Freud, Darwin and Aristotle. Furthermore, these theories can be compared on the extent to which they believe human nature is malleable. Conservative individualism, Freud, Rousseau, biological and non-self theories all in Loptson’s view hold that human nature is more or less fixed. In contrast, Marx and Aristotle for example, believed that human nature was malleable. In his concluding remarks, Loptson notes that despite the relative merits of the various theories of human nature, the route to progress is likely to lie in a biological theory of human nature, specifically in evolutionary biology and primatology.

Comments

As the discussion and readings from this semester have illustrated, there is a strong connection between Western philosophical theories of human nature and psychology. Besides the theories of Watson and Freud which are recognized for directly influencing psychology, the underlying premise of the other theories, specifically the Christian theories of human nature, liberalism and the biological theories of human nature have informed psychological theory and methodology in a number of ways. Psychology thus should more aptly be called ‘Western psychology’. The theories and methodologies of psychology have been and continue to be closely tied to Western philosophical thought.

However, mainstream psychologists do not recognize the philosophical assumptions which govern their theories and methodologies and often make universalist claims. The applicability of the theories and methodologies of psychology are limited. It is important for psychologists to employ a self-reflexivity in their approach to studying the behavior, cognitions and emotions of individuals.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the data provided from cross-cultural research is not sufficient to validate universal claims that psychological theories may hold, for the research continues to be conducted within a Western epistemological paradigm. For example, Kohlberg’s theory of moral development has been tested cross-culturally but it is fundamentally problematic for many reasons. It assumes that what is deemed ‘moral’ is universal. However, morality is not self-evident and is defined in accordance with the social, cultural, religious norms that exist in a particular place. In addition, the moral dilemmas that he uses are predicated on the assumption of an individualistic conception of human nature. In collectivistic societies in which the individual is inseparable from the kin group, many of these dilemmas would not have much relevance.