York University, 2007/2008  
Department of Psychology, Faculty of Health  
Theories of Human Nature: 4220 6.0A (Y)  
Course Director: Dr. Thomas Teo

Time  Wednesday: 8:30-11:30  
Seminar room  207 BSB  
Thomas Teo  231 BSB  
Tel: 416 736 2100 #40553  
Office hours: By appointment  
E-mail: tteo@yorku.ca  
http://www.yorku.ca/tteo  
Secretary  Barbara Thurston (283 BSB)  
Prerequisites  See 2007/2008 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 from a critical-psychological point of view.  
• 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 5:  First class meeting.

September 12: Lecture on critical thinking regarding theories of human nature.

September 19: Lecture on critical thinking, reading, and understanding texts.
READ: Theories: Chapter 1: Introduction.
        Chapter 2: Essentialism, Materialism, and Idealism.

September 26: Classical theories of human nature. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.
READ: Theories: Chapter 3: Aristotle.

First student presentations!
First summary / comment for September 26 meeting is due on September 24 (Monday) at 13:00 (see below).

READ: Theories: Chapter 4: Christian philosophy of human nature.

October 10: Liberal theories of human nature. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.
READ: Theories: Chapter 5: Liberalism.

October 17: Conservative individualistic theories of human nature. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.
READ: Theories: Chapter 6: Conservative individualism.

October 24: Rousseau and Marx on human nature. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.
READ: Theories: Chapter 7: Rousseau & Chapter 8: Marx.

October 31: Darwin on human nature. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.
READ: Theories: Chapter 9: Darwin.

November 7: Freud and human nature. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.
READ: Theories: Chapter 10: Freud.

November 14: Non-self theories of human nature. Lecture, presentation, and discussion.
READ: Theories: Chapter 11: Non-self theories.

READ: Theories: Chapter 12: Feminism
November 28: Exams (for students with more than two missed meetings). Additional individual meetings optional.

Reading material: Winter term (tentative)


Of Interest


Tentative Winter Term Outline


January 16: Race and racism.
READ: Winston: Chapter 1 (Weizmann: Type and essence)

January 23: Knowledge and racism.
(b) Gould: Three centuries' perspectives on race and racism (pp. 391-424)
First comment in Winter term is due on January 21!

January 30: Plato, Agassiz, Morton.
READ: (a) Gould (1996): Introduction (Chapter 1; pp. 51-61)

February 1, 2008: Deadline for withdrawing from course without receiving a grade.

February 6: Galton, Broca, Lombroso.
READ: (a) Winston: Chapter 2 (Fancher: The concept of race in the life and thought of Francis Galton).
(b) Gould (1996): Measuring heads: Paul Broca and the heyday of craniology (Chapter 3; pp. 105-141)
(c) Gould (1996): Measuring bodies: Two case studies on the apishness of undesirables (Chapter 4; pp. 142-175)

February 13: Reading week [February 11-15].

February 20: IQ.
February 27: IQ.

March 5: Reification.

March 12: 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: Hereditity, intelligence, and race in textbooks, 1930-1970).

March 19: 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 26: 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).

April 2: Reflections on epistemological violence.
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 28, 2007.
- 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!
Attendance will be taken around 9:00. A signature missing at that time counts as a missed meeting. Attendance is required until the end of class.

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 **25-30 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, 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 e-mail).**
- Include a **reference list**!
- Use at least **25%** primary sources in your presentation.
- In the peer-evaluation process do not grade your own presentation or a collaborator. If you did not collaborate with a presenter (on the same day as your presentation) you may grade his or her presentation.
- 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 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. **Focus:** A specific theory of human nature and consequences / relevance to psychology.
- **Winter:** Based on the presentation. Address relevance to 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 16 different academic sources. Use subheadings but do not add empty lines.
- Use at least **25%** primary sources in your paper.
- **Course specific:** Use page numbers if you make a specific claim: Teo (2005) suggested that scientific racism is a form of intuition (see pp. 164-165); Teo (2005) used the term *culture-centrism* to emphasize biased forms of intuition (see p. 165).
• The deadline for the Fall paper is January 3, 2008. Send e-mail attachment and hand in a hardcopy no later than the first meeting on January 9. There will be deductions for late submissions.
• The deadline for the Winter paper is April 2, 2008. Send e-mail attachment. Hand in hardcopy no later than Friday, April 4, 2008. 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.
• 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 for 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).
• Summary / 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, summary / comments should be submitted 1, 2, or 3 days earlier (but not later).
• The first summary / comment is due on September 24 for the September 26 meeting.
• Send 1 attachment and not 2!

(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 21 for the January 23 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 comments need to be submitted!
• If the day of comment submission falls on a holiday, comments should be submitted 1, 2, or 3 days earlier (but not later).

• **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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Final course grades may be adjusted to conform to Program or Faculty grades distribution profiles!
IMPORTANT COURSE INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS (excerpts)

Academic Honesty and Integrity

York students are required to maintain high standards of academic integrity. Academic honesty requires that persons do not falsely claim credit for the ideas, writing or other intellectual property of others, either by presenting such works as their own or through impersonation. Similarly, academic honesty requires that persons do not cheat (attempt to gain an improper advantage in an academic evaluation), nor attempt or actually alter, suppress, falsify or fabricate any research ... .

See: http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/

Access and Disability

York University shall make reasonable and appropriate accommodations and adaptations in order to promote the ability of students with disabilities to fulfill the academic requirements of their programs. ... Students with disabilities who require accommodations shall, in a timely manner, provide the relevant medical, psychoeducational or psychiatric documentation to the appropriate York University office for students with disabilities to qualify for accommodations.

See also: http://www.yorku.ca/dshub/

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 pose such a conflict, contact the course director immediately.

See: https://w2prod.sis.yorku.ca/Apps/WebObjects/cdm.woa/wa/regobs

Student Conduct

Students are expected to conduct themselves in a way that supports research, teaching and learning, and that promotes an atmosphere of civility, diversity, equity and respect in their interactions with one another. They should strive to make the campus safe, to support the dignity of individuals and groups, and to uphold essential freedoms.

See: http://www.yorku.ca/scdr/index.html
Example of a student summary / comment

Jane Doe (Reading: November xyz)

Summary of xyz

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 and changeable. 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.

Word Count: 200

Comments on xyz

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.

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