

# Module PS5231

## Conceptual Issues and Theoretical Perspectives

The School  
of

Psychology & Neuroscience



University  
of  
St Andrews

DRAFT

## **Timetable:**

Week	9-11am	1-3pm
	Maths Lecture Theatre D (TBC)	Room 1.06, Psychology
1	Introduction	Workshop
2	What is science?	Workshop
3	What is psychology?	Workshop
4	Philosophical Perspectives 1	Workshop
5	Philosophical Perspectives 2	Workshop

## **Aims and Objectives:**

This module aims to develop an advanced understanding of the historical and philosophical background to current debates in psychology via the lecture programme. Teaching will also be based on seminars in which class members will be expected to play an active part (group discussion followed by class discussion), based on reading and critical evaluation of original material. Emphasis will be placed on the development of the skill of critical evaluation of alternative models and levels of explanations of behaviour, with a particular focus on current debates and critiques of psychology. Overall, the purpose of the module is to involve participants in discussion and debate on the importance and relevance of psychological research today.

The British Psychological Society suggests that the syllabus should be structured around a number of key questions:

“What is science, and to what extent does psychology (the science of the mind) exemplify scientific characteristics? To what extent is psychology socially and culturally constructed? Can psychology be politically neutral? Can psychology be morally neutral?”

Methods of acquiring knowledge: scientific method versus commonsense; the relationship between facts and values. Critiques of traditional methods in psychology; the significance of the standpoint from which values are understood.

Paradigms and research programmes: Lessons from the history of psychology: Reductionism, structuralism, functionalism, relativism and, for example, approaches to personality, intelligence, and the nature of consciousness.

Critical psychology and subjectivity: the critical psychological view of subject and subjectivity. The origins of ethical issues for psychology; moral underpinnings of the theory, research and practice of psychology; psychologists and community members as partners in the construction of ethically responsible practices.”

**Attendance is monitored and you will be expected to attend at least 40% of the sessions.**

My office hours are Monday to Thursday 11.00-12.00 but you can also email me to set up an alternative time. I anticipate that we will have workshops on Thursday 1.00-2.00 or 2.00-3.00 and our tutorials on Fridays 11.00-12.00 for one group and then 12.00-13.00 for the other. Please sign up in MMS for Group 1 or 2. **The first lecture is 20th September, 2018.**

#### **Continuous Assessment:**

In response to student feedback I have amended the assessment from previous years to reduce the pressure on the high tariff nature of having only one assessment and to broaden the scope of coverage.

The assessment has two components allowing you to draw on your knowledge of a number of areas within the field of psychology (1) What is a human? (500 words – 25%) The submission date is by 17:00 26th September –uploaded into MMS; (2) a 2000 word (The submission date is by 17:00 5th November – uploaded into MMS) essay analysing the following topic (75%):

“A scientist placed 100 two-year olds on an uninhabited but fertile island, half boys, half girls. He provided the minimum requirements to keep them alive. The children received no language, education, culture etc., He slowly began to feed them less and less until he gave them nothing at all. After 10 years what have they become?”

Further guidance will be provided throughout the course.

**Suggested Preparatory Reading: Hughes, B.M. (2012) Conceptual and Historical Issues in Psychology. ISBN: 978-0-273-73728-5**

(I actually get a name-check in the acknowledgements where they kindly promote me to Professor)

Lecture titles

### **Lecture 1. Introduction to the module.**

In this session I will outline the aims and objectives of the course and offer an overview of our journey.

### **Lecture 2. What is this thing called science? (and pseudoscience)**

You might have thought that this was obvious but the history of science is littered with comment and criticism. This lecture will explore these critiques.

### **Lecture 3. What is psychology?**

Wittgenstein suggested that “Psychology has experimental method but conceptual confusion”. Are we all asking the same questions or even speaking the same language?

### **Lecture 4. Models of the person and society I: Philosophical perspectives.**

Some of the questions that we address in psychology have been around for a very long time. Jung has suggested that as soon as humans recognised their own existence then “in that one moment .... The world sprang into being”

### **Lecture 5. Models of the person and society II: Twentieth Century thought.**

As industrial societies emerged and science rose to eminence modern thought turned to question what it is to be a person in society.

### **Afternoon sessions:**

We will explore some of the themes and literature, critique papers, and carry out some practical activities to underpin the main concepts.

### **Introductory Reading List suggestions (I will provide the main readings in Moodle):**

- Brysbaert, M. and Rastle, K. (2009) *Historical and Conceptual Issues in Psychology*. London: Pearson.
- Bem, S. and de Jong, H.L. (1997) *Theoretical Issues in Psychology*. London: Sage Publications.
- Bolton, N. (Ed) (1979) *Philosophical problems in psychology*. London: Methuen and Co.
- Chalmers, A.F. (1999) *What is this thing called science?* Open University Press
- Dunbar, R. (1996) *The trouble with science*. London: Faber and Faber
- Stanovich, K. (2001) *How to think straight about psychology*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Thomson, A. (2002) *Critical Reasoning: a practical introduction*. London: Routledge.

You might also wish to consider the representation of psychology in popular culture e.g. A Clockwork Orange, One flew over the cuckoo's nest, Walden II etc.,

### **Graduate Attributes (Transferable and Generic Skills)**

The School of Psychology and Neuroscience offers opportunities in all of its modules to obtain, practice and demonstrate many of the core skills below. Across the whole programme of modules you will be able to draw on concrete examples (i.e. evidence) for all of these skills in order to promote yourself to prospective employers and others.

In PS5231 we have particular strengths for opportunities to:

1. Demonstrate original thought
2. Construct a coherent argument or debate by demonstrating logical processing of (complex) information and deductive reasoning
3. Apply critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis to solve complex problems
4. Test hypotheses, theories, methods and evidence within their proper contexts
5. Reason from the particular to the general
6. Identify relevant techniques and concepts to solve advanced and complex problems
7. Demonstrate use of an appropriate range of resources to the task at hand
8. Evaluate relevant best practices for the task at hand
9. Engage directly with current research, developments and skills in the discipline
10. Engage with primary and secondary material and differentiate between them
11. Demonstrate active learning
12. Demonstrate reflective learning, including the ability to engage with and learn from feedback
13. Demonstrate creativity and curiosity
14. Demonstrate independence of thought and reasoning
15. Demonstrate skills in time management, self-discipline and self-motivation
16. Demonstrate skills in close textual and comparative analysis
17. Demonstrate skills in close analysis of visual material
18. Demonstrate advanced IT skills
19. Demonstrate quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis
20. Demonstrate expertise in the use of statistical software packages for recording, manipulation & analysis of data
21. Convey statistical results & methods in a manner understandable to the lay-person via written or oral reports
22. Work independently
23. Work as part of a team
24. Communicate with clarity and accuracy, orally (including presentation) and in writing
25. Engage with the views and opinions of others
26. Present work and findings in a professional manner, with attention to detail
27. Learn and use research skills

The table below indicates the main content areas covered across PS5231 in relation to the BPS Curriculum in the academic year 2018-19.

## ***Individual Differences***

Individual differences – Personality; Intelligence; Nomothetic and idiographic approaches; models of mental health. Identity and Embodiment

## ***Cognition curriculum***

Language, Cognition & emotion, Expertise

## ***Developmental & evolutionary curriculum***

kin selection, altruism; group selection and ESS; prosociality; functional and causal explanations, early humans, spread, cognitive innovations. Learning and social learning; association theory, social learning; imitation and affordance learning. Attribution of intent, role-taking.

## ***Methodology curriculum***

What is science? Thematic analysis of transcripts

### **Social curriculum**

Group productivity, deindividuation, social influence, leadership and power. Prejudice and discrimination, outgroup favouritism, collective action, intergroup contact  
Helping, empathy, intergroup helping, frustration-aggression, dehumanisation,

### **Conceptual and Historical Issues**

Beliefs, Concepts and categories. Brains, minds and machines. reductionism ; Freewill and determinism; Reductionism, structuralism, functionalism, relativism; Psychology and Society; Criticisms of Psychology; WEIRD participants; psychology as anthropology; Freudianism, behaviourism, humanistic psychology. Social Constructionism; Positive Psychology, mindfulness