

Psychology 4400A

Capstone in Psychology

15:05-17:45, Tuesday, PE261



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Office Hours:

Tuesdays 1.45-2.45pm and by appointment.

Objective:

Scientific thought is rich in metaphor. On the one hand, the use of metaphor can be seen as the means by which we extend the boundaries of scientific knowledge through a process known as “catachresis” – of intentionally using a word to denote something for which, without the catachresis, there is no name – and, in so doing, bringing into being entirely new ways of thinking. In this view, as a field develops, so the need for metaphorical usage falls away. On the other hand, one could argue that metaphor forms the core of science (and the core metaphysical world-views of scientists themselves) and that metaphorical usage does not – and indeed cannot – give way to literal understanding. Instead, the original metaphorical usage simply is reified (creating the impression of literal usage) or replaced by a new metaphor that provides greater potential for scientific exploration. In this view, our scientific understanding inevitably remains fundamentally metaphorical, even as it becomes more precise in its explanations and accurate in its predictions. (Note that this does not mean that our understanding of the world is ungrounded. Accepting that all scientific knowledge is metaphorical is not to deny that there is an external reality that is amenable to accurate prediction and explanation, via application of the scientific method. Nor does it imply that there are many equally valid “truths” about the world (i.e., accepting this view doesn’t mean one has to embrace a crude form of “relativism”). It does, however, raise some interesting questions about the nature of objectivity, and also the notion of what it means to say we have made scientific progress, and we will explore during the course.)

Issues like these are made all the more interesting when we consider the use of metaphor in psychology. How has our ability to engage in metaphorical thought – a capacity one could argue is the defining feature of human cognition – influenced the development of a scientific field that aims to understand the nature of thought and cognition? This will be the over-arching theme of our course as a means of exploring the history of ideas within your chosen discipline.

A consideration of how and why particular metaphors come into play across time and space also helps reveal is that science is, above all else, a human activity: one that is produced by people “with bodies, situated in time, space, culture and society and struggling for credibility and authority” as the historian, Steven Shapin, has written. The world views of different scientists inevitably have shaped their choice of metaphors: in some cases, this had led them (and us) up blind alleys; in some, it has led to great leaps of the imagination. Many metaphors meet with the instant approval of other scientists, and some just never catch on. How and why this should be so are interesting questions to explore. Understanding science as a human activity also means recognizing that it is an on-going process; our own ideas – that is, those of the people who have been teaching you these last four years – have been informed by others in ways that reflects the nature of our own time, place, culture and society. You too are part of this process and so, as the course develops, you should come to see how you fit it into the history of psychology and, potentially, how you might shape its future.

Structure of the Course

The course is lecture/seminar-based, and works best if you come to class fully prepared (i.e., having read the assigned papers for that particular week) and ready to participate in class discussions and debates. This isn't a course where you can just sit back, snooze and then wing it right at the end. If you have the right attitude, and understand that you'll be responsible for your own learning, and that you'll get as much out of the course as you're prepared to put in, then it should all work extremely well. No whining or wimping allowed.

Readings

There is no set text for this course. Instead, you will be given a series of readings that will form the basis for class discussions. Readings will be posted on Moodle. You are also encouraged to seek out readings on topics of interest for yourself, and we will place more emphasis on this towards the end of the course, when you have greater familiarity with the course structure and the subject area.

Course Web Sites

The class website is on Moodle. Here you'll find the course outline, readings, announcements, suggestions for paper topics and guidelines for researching and writing your paper.

Evaluation

The course will be assessed by a single paper. This may sound daunting but you will have the opportunity to discuss, draft and revise your work (as often as you like) throughout the course. You can write a paper on whatever topic you like as long as it is relevant to the themes of the course. If need be, I will supply a list of suggestions for those who need a bit of help and inspiration, but we're counting on you to develop your own ideas and pursue your own interests.

To provide some structure throughout the semester and help keep you on track, something that seems to be essential, based on last's year class performance and the abysmal time-management skills of the average Lethbridge undergraduate, you will need to supply the following on the dates given below:

Tuesday October 11th: PROPOSALS FOR ESSAY TOPIC

You are required to hand in a clear and concise description of THREE completely DIFFERENT potential topics for your paper. All three should receive equal treatment at this stage (in other words, don't get your heart set on one topic, or list three that are just variations on the same theme). The aim here is to get you thinking as broadly as possible about what interests you, and to help you identify a productive topic that will produce a good essay.

For each topic, the brief description should consist of THREE full sentences, in which you describe (a) the fundamental psychological topic under consideration (b) how it relates to the course themes of metaphor, history or both and (c) the specific angle you intend to pursue with respect to this topic area.

For example:

“The subject of my essay will be construals of the self across different cultures, with an emphasis on the ideas of independence and interdependence. This can be tied to both the history of social psychology as a discipline, and also the metaphors that are used to describe selves, e.g., the self as a narrative. I wish to pursue the idea that even those aspects of the self that are often considered to be universal may be more “culture-bound” than we suppose.”

These essay proposals will NOT receive a grade, but they will be mandatory to pass the course.

Tuesday November 1st: DRAFT ESSAY SUBMISSION

You are required to hand in a full draft of your essay, on which you can expect comprehensive feedback, which will be graded and will constitute 25% of your overall final mark.

IMPORTANT: You can elect NOT to receive a grade for your draft essay, if you wish. This choice must be made at the time of submission, and you cannot change your mind subsequently. This option is, in effect, allowing you to choose the weighting given to your paper. You can either opt for 25% for the draft and 75% for the final version, or 100% for the final version. If you choose the latter, you will still receive feedback on your paper in just the same way as if you had elected to receive a grade.

This option is intended to treat you like the adults you are, in a (probably vain, but nevertheless optimistic) effort to get you to recognize that some things are worth doing because they are rewarding, valuable and educational in and of themselves, and not simply because you receive a grade for them. There is, of course, a sense in which electing to not receive a grade is a gamble, but it is one that is more likely to pay-off in your favour than not, if you're prepared to put in the work and effort needed. If you write a very poor draft, which receives a low grade, then you will need to work extremely hard to ensure that the final draft is of sufficient quality to compensate. If you choose not to receive a grade, then you will have to judge for yourself how much work and effort is needed to produce a top-quality paper but, at the same time, you will not have potentially handicapped yourself by receiving a low grade for a poor initial draft. Think carefully.

Note that because you are being given the option to discuss, revise and go over your paper both formally as outlined above, and informally by meeting with and discussing things with the course instructors, the marking will be tough, but it will be fair and aimed at helping you improve.

For the draft version of your paper, there will be no rubric: the length, number of references, breadth/depth of treatment etc, will be left entirely up to you. We consider this to be part of your assessment: we want to see how well you can use your judgment with respect to providing sufficient detail, supporting references and making a clear, concise and cogent argument, free of unnecessary waffle. You will, however, be able to ask as many questions as you like prior to draft submission, and receive help and feedback on these issues.

Following submission and feedback on drafts, if necessary, I will provide a rubric that remedy the most common problems encountered, and provide a means for you to check that you have got all your bases covered for the final submission.

Tuesday DECEMBER 6th: FINAL ESSAY SUBMISSION

The final version of your essay will be due on the TUESDAY of the final week of classes, with a deadline of 4 PM. You can hand-in your essay using the drop-box outside the psychology office on the 8th level of U-Hall (Check you know where this is ahead of time: no lame excuses about not being able to find it). At 4 PM, a piece of coloured paper will be placed in the box on top of all the submitted essays. Any essays that are submitted following the deadline on the same day will thus be easily identified, and will be subject to a -5% penalty. Any essays that are handed in on subsequent days will be subject to a -10% penalty for each day (24 hours) that your paper is late.

Your final letter grade will be based on your percentage score as given in the table below:

A+	91-100	C+	67-69
A	86-90	C	63-66
A-	81-85	C-	60 – 62
B+	77-80	D+	55 – 59
B	73-76	D	50 – 54
B-	70-72	F	< 50

Date	Instructor	Topic
Sept 13	Louise Barrett	Introduction
Sept 20	Louise Barrett	Why Behaviourism isn't Satanism
Sept 27	Sergio Pellis	Ethology & the Selfish Gene
Oct 4th	Peter Henzi	Freud, Ethology & Me
Oct 11th	Drew Rendall	Metaphors of Communication
Oct 18th	Louise Barrett	Essay Workshop #1: making metaphors work for you
Oct 25th	Louise Barrett	Essay Workshop #2: how to be scholarly...
Nov 1st	Paul Vasey	Compass or Waveform? Metaphors of Sexual Orientation
Nov 8th	Scott Allen	A Non-Freudian Approach to the Unconscious
Nov 15th	John Vokey	Mistaking Constructs for Phenomena
Nov 22nd	Javid Sadr	TBA
Nov 29th	Louise Barrett	overview and summary (aka last-minute essay panic)
Dec 6th	NO CLASS	ESSAY DEADLINE