

Psychology 4850A
Capstone in Psychology

Fall 2010
15:00-17:50, Monday, LI050



Course Coordinator:

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Office Hours:

By appointment

Objective:

Scientific thought is rich in metaphor. On the one hand, it can be seen as the means by which we extend the boundaries of science through a process of “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. It does, however, raise questions some interesting questions about objectivity, and also the notion of scientific progress, which we can explore during the course)

These issues 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 psychology.

A consideration of how and why particular metaphors come into play also helps reveal is that science is a human activity, produced by people “with bodies, situated in time, space, culture and society and struggling for credibility and authority” as the historian, Steven Shapin, puts it. The world views of different scientists have shaped their choice of metaphors; in some cases, this had led to blind allies, in some it has led to great leaps of the imagination; some metaphors have met with the approval of other scientists, and some just never caught on. How and why this should be are interesting questions to explore. Understanding science as a human activity also means recognising that it is an on-going process and that the ways in which our own ideas— that is, those of the people who have been teaching you these last three or four years—have been developed and 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 seminar-based, and you will be expected to come to class fully prepared (i.e., having read the assigned paper for that particular week) and ready to participate in class discussions and debates.

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 webCT. 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 webCT (<http://webCT.uleth.ca>). 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 one paper worth 100%. 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. I will also supply a list of suggestions for those who need a bit of help and inspiration.

You are required to submit a detailed outline of your intended paper by October 25th 2010 on which you can expect comprehensive feedback. This will not receive a grade, but it will be mandatory and required to pass the course. There will also be a 'workshop' session during the semester to deal with questions and queries and to offer help and suggestions.

There is no rubric for the papers: the length, number of references, breadth/depth of treatment etc, will be left entirely up to you. This is considered part of your assessment: we want to see how well can you 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 and receive help and feedback on these issues.

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

A+	90-100	C+	67-70
A	85-90	C	63-67
A-	80-85	C-	60 – 63
B+	77-80	D+	55 – 60
B	73-77	D	50 – 54
B-	70-73	F	< 50

SYLLABUS

Date	Instructor	Topic
Sept 13th	Louise Barrett	Introduction
Sept 20th	Louise Barrett	Minds, Brains and Computers
Sept 27th	Drew Rendall	Conduits & Communication
Oct 4th	Peter Henzi	Behaviourism & Ethology
Oct 11th	HOLIDAY	
Oct 18th	Sergio Pellis	Ethology and the Selfish Gene
Oct 25th	Louise Barrett Drew Rendall	Metaphors as "cognitive tools"
Nov 1st	Paul Vasey	The orientation metaphor in studies of sexuality
Nov 8th	Louise Barrett	ESSAY WORKSHOP
Nov 15th	Scott Allen	The adaptive unconscious
Nov 22nd	John Vokey	Implicit learning & memory
Nov 29th	Louise Barrett	Final overview
Dec 6th	Louise Barrett	Last minute panic type stuff....